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Effective literacy instruction in the elementary grades

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EFFECTIVE LITERACY INSTRUCTION
IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify elements present in effective literacy instruction, i.e., those elements that fostered reading, speaking, listening, thinking, writing, and metacognitive skills. By examining variables that promoted literacy acquisition and achievement, a detailed account resulted which described classroom practice as related to teacher beliefs, strategies, materials, and classroom climate.

The primary method of qualitative analysis used for this study was the Developmental Research Sequence (DRS) Method (Spradley, 1980). Two classrooms with exemplary teachers were studied extensively. Data collection involved the use of primary sources (interviews, observations, and student and teacher work) and secondary sources (records, databases, etc.). Fieldwork included note taking and audio and video recording. The cyclic model involved asking questions, making descriptive observations, collecting and analyzing data and using analysis to form new questions. Research led to the uncovering of themes present in effective literacy instruction. The study concluded with an ethnographic case study that postulates possible scenarios pertaining to instructional strategies, teacher personal beliefs, materials, and classroom climate. The findings from this study can assist reading teachers in development and implementation of effective instruction. Reading specialists and administrators will find the results useful in developing professional growth activities for teachers of reading. This study expands the existing literature on effective literacy instruction and allows the everyday practitioner to learn from these examples of success.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Because a literate society is an undeniable goal of any advanced culture, the topic of effective literacy instruction has permeated research for many years. A review of the literature concerning effective literacy instruction reveals that the terms reading and literacy are frequently used interchangeably. There have been numerous studies conducted on specific strategies in reading. However, most often the term literacy encompasses an integrated concept—one including reading, speaking, listening, thinking, writing, and metacognitive skills. Effective literacy instruction develops individuals who are able to recognize and decode words, read fluently, and comprehend what has been read (Adams, 1990; Anderson et al., 1985; Chall, 1967). Additionally, effective literacy instruction leads to individuals being able to mentally process what has been read and react to this through thought, writing, or speech. Effective literacy instruction involves the development of individuals capable of reflecting on what has been read and creating meaning (Allington, 2001; Flippo, 2001; Gambrell & Mazzoni, 1999; Popp, 1975, Pressley, 2002). Often this is accomplished by integrating past experiences or previously learned information with new knowledge gained through reading. Effective literacy instruction is instruction that results in successful communicators – readers and writers who are able to respond to and with the written word. Over the years, researchers have sought to identify proven methods that enhance literacy instruction.

Bond and Dykstra (1967/1997) conducted a meta-analysis to determine the impact of school and community characteristics (e.g., various pupil, teacher, class, school, and community characteristics) and approach to initial reading instruction (e.g.,

basal texts only, basal with phonics, i.t.a. (Initial Teaching Alphabet program), linguistic programs, language experience, and a combination of phonics and linguistics). The study investigated whether reading programs were differentially affected by students' level of reading readiness. The results were presented in the report of the Coordinating Center of the Cooperative Research Program in First-Grade Reading Instruction. Using data from twenty-seven individual studies, the study concluded that variation in reading achievement is due in part to reading readiness. The single best indicator of first grade reading achievement was the ability to recognize alphabet letter names and the ability to discriminate between word sounds prior to the beginning of reading instruction. Girls tended to have a higher degree of reading readiness upon entering first grade and tended to have higher reading achievement at the end of first grade than boys. Class size was not significantly related to reading achievement, and teacher characteristics (e.g., experience and efficiency) were only slightly related. However, the study found that not all programs had the same effect in every situation. This led to the conclusion that there were other factors that affect reading achievement and that these factors had a greater impact on reading success than reading readiness. The study found that "No one approach is so distinctly better in all situations and respects than the others that it should be considered the one best method and the one to be used exclusively" (p. 416). The authors recommend that a combination of programs may be most beneficial as well as the systematic instruction of word study skills and the inclusion of a writing component. They also suggest that initial reading vocabulary represent a balance between high frequency words and words that are phonetically regular. Finally, the authors concluded,

“To improve reading instruction, it is necessary to train better teachers of reading rather than to expect a panacea in the form of materials” (p. 416).

Another classic study was chronicled by Jeanne Chall in *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (1967). This study included research from 1912 – 1965. It concluded that “a code –emphasis method [for beginning reading instruction]. . . produces better results” (p. 307). The study did not find that any one code-emphasis method was superior over others nor did it discount reading-for-meaning as reading ability progressed. In Chall’s *Conclusions and Recommendations* she emphasized the need for designing instruction to meet student need.

Toward a Literate Society: The Report of the Committee on Reading of the National Academy of Education (Carroll and Chall, 1975) addressed several questions, among them “How can research and development provide a more effective base for reading program efforts in education?” (p. ix). Topics included teacher education, beginning reading instruction, and implications for instruction based on research. Included in this volume was Helen M. Popp’s “Current Practices in the Teaching of Beginning Reading” (1975). It reviewed previous research, including Bond and Dykstra (1967/1997) and Chall (1967). This study listed materials available as an illustration of how publishers were incorporating elements from research – for example, initial emphasis of instruction, word attack skills presented, types of activities involving students, and representation of multiple cultures in the content. The study reiterates the fact that there is not one best method for teaching reading. Popp adds,

Analyzing major components of reading (e.g., decoding and comprehension), breaking these into subskills, and further breaking the subskills into specific behavioral objectives is a useful scheme for research. It allows one to look at the efficacy of particular methods in achieving those objectives. However, there is an

inherent danger in getting locked into a sequence of mastering objectives; it is possible for the objectives themselves to be thought of as absolutely necessary for all students who wish to master initial reading. Already in commercially available materials there are instances where the objectives assume such an all-important role that normal reading behavior seems to be thought of as unattainable except by the prescribed route (p. 116).

The Follow Through Program (Stebbins et al, 1977) was a national study designed to explore different models of education and their effect on achievement for disadvantaged children. Millions of dollars were invested in the program by the federal government. Sponsors participating in the study implemented programs that, for the purpose of evaluation, were grouped into one of three categories—basic skills models, cognitive/ conceptual skills models, or affective skills models. A combination of research and demonstration, the study was under the direction of the Office of Education. The program was designed and data was collected by the Stanford Research Group. Due to the vast amount of data collected and concerns about synthesizing such, the Huron Institute was charged with the duty of assisting the Office of Education with determining analytic samples and reducing the data. Abt Associates, Inc. analyzed the data and wrote the final report. Using information obtained from more than 350,000 students (both Follow Through and comparison children), the study attributed the greatest gains to basic skills approaches.

Opinions concerning the findings of the Follow Through Program varied. Some claim that the findings of Follow Through provided answers to educational problems (Becker, 1977; Becker & Engelman, 1973; Gersten, 2001, Hodges, 1978; Meyer, Gersten, & Gutkin, 1983). Others were critical. For example, the Ford Foundation sponsored a critique of the Follow Through which found fault with methodology and conclusions drawn. Among the criticisms was the complaint that the instruments used

were biased toward basic skills models. The critique concluded that no model was superior to another but that the “peculiarities of individual schools, neighborhoods, and homes” have a greater effect on student achievement than any program (House, Glass, McLean, & Walker, 1978, p.130). Another criticism of the study claimed that growth was due to sponsorship factors—those benefits that accompanied the study such as nutritional, medical, and dental benefits (Brandt, 1978).

The Office of Education, in its response to the Ford Foundation critique (Wisler, Burns, & Iwamoto, 1978), admitted that there were problems with the evaluation of the project; however, it claimed that the project validated compensatory education. The authors pointed out one basic skills model, the Direct Instruction model, sponsored by the University of Oregon, as being notable. Of this model, the authors said, “Though not successful everywhere and not uniformly successful in all its outcomes, that model showed the best pattern of success” (p. 180).

The DISTAR (Direct Instruction System for Teaching and Remediation) program developed by Wesley Becker and Siegfried Engelmann (1973) was based on the belief that “a child who fails is a child who has not been taught” (p. 1). DISTAR targeted the teaching of concepts in reading and math with programmed materials that required systematic responses and reinforcement. Results from sites implementing Direct Instruction were varied. While some sites were able to show large gains, other sites using Direct Instruction had negative results (Anderson, St. Pierre, Proper, & Stebbins, 1978; Wisler et al, 1978).

The debate continues regarding the success of Direct Instruction. To some, Direct Instruction is considered the end-all to reading difficulties (Adams, G., 1996; Engelmann,

1999; Gersten, 2001; Meyer, Gersten, & Gutkin, 1983; Nadler, 1998). For others, it is, at best, another tool to use in the teaching of reading (Manzo & Park, 2004, Wisler, Burns, Iwamoto, 1978) and, at worst, an instrument that stifles teacher input and deemphasizes reading for meaning (Baines & Stanley, 2000; Goral, 2001).

In 1983 the National Institute of Education established the National Academy of Education's Commission on Education and Public Policy. This commission produced the document *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). The commission examined research on the reading process, "environmental influences of reading," and instructional methods to identify effective practices in the teaching of reading. The report concluded, "Quality instruction involves many elements...For large gains, many elements must be in place" (p. 4).

The study specifically listed the following as necessary for reading achievement: parental assistance in laying the foundation for reading, the need for kindergartens to develop oral language, phonics instruction in early reading, the use of readers that are "interesting, comprehensible, and instructive," the use of both oral and silent reading, the structuring of reading lessons to include "understanding and appreciating the content of the selection" (p. 57-58). The study also examined ways to create a "literate environment" and made recommendations concerning the integration of reading and writing, skills instruction, grouping, and the amount of time spent reading. The study stated, "Priority should be given to independent reading. Two hours a week of independent reading should be expected by the time children are in the third or fourth grade" (p. 82). The study also concluded, "Improving reading instruction in the United States is not possible without good teachers" (p. 114).

One body of research frequently referenced in the literature was the work of Adams (1990) done in conjunction with the Reading Research and Education Center and published as the text *Beginning to Read*. Originally conceived as an opportunity to update *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (Chall, 1967), the text included “controversies surrounding phonics instruction, issues and research in early reading instruction, basic perceptual and reading processes, the processes involved in identifying sounds, letters, words, and meaning, and the processes involved in learning to read” (p. vi). The text incorporated all research available at the time, including knowledge on phonemic awareness that was not available at the time of previous studies. Adams recognized the need for both phonics instruction and meaning-based approaches in the teaching of reading.

Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) was a U. S. sponsored report that highlighted the importance of having highly skilled teachers for successful programs. Other factors emphasized were the importance of language skills and alphabetic principles of young learners. Pearson (1999) reviewed this document and calls it a summary of the “perceptual, linguistic, cognitive, and social bases of reading” (p. 232) and identifies the study as “a book about the best way to teach reading to all children in preschool through Grade 3” (p. 235). He details that adequate reading instruction includes a focus on:

1. using reading to obtain meaning from print
2. phonemic and morphological awareness
3. knowledge of letters and their sequences
4. frequent opportunities to read and write (p. 233).

The National Reading Panel (NRP) report, *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and its Implications for Reading Instruction* (National Institute of Child Health and Development, 2000), was completed at the request of the United States Congress. The panel, comprised of fourteen members, used the conclusions of *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998) as a starting point to examine over 400 experimental and quasi-experimental research studies. The topics included alphabetics (phonemic awareness and phonics), fluency (guided oral reading and independent silent reading), comprehension (vocabulary instruction, text comprehension instruction, and comprehension strategies instruction), teacher education (preservice and inservice) and computer technology. The use of the panel's findings to shape classroom instruction is often referred to by proponents of the study as implementing research-based reading instruction. However, critics of the report cite absence of thorough review of qualitative research and question the panel's claim of using a scientific approach. For example, Cunningham (2001) voices disapproval at the panel's omission of correlational studies and takes exception to what he considers "simplistic, old-fashioned, and generally discredited verificationism of the National Reading Panel" (p. 328). Cunningham takes exception to the standards set by the Panel – "essentially those normally used in research studies of the efficacy of interventions in psychological and medical research" (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development 2000a, 1-5), stating that reading education should not be equated with a series of interventions. The Panel's report did conclude with the hope that future research would include qualitative research that meets rigorous guidelines for review.

Regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with the findings of the panel and the methods used to conduct the study, a consensus of the NRP report and past research is summarized by Shanahan (2003) that “*teaching matters*” (p. 648). The classroom teacher plays a vital role in students’ ability to become successful readers. IRA Executive Director Alan Farstrup echoes the importance of the teacher. He states, “The expert teacher, professionally trained and experienced in delivering excellent reading instruction, is the most important variable in achieving reading success” (Farstrup, 2003).

Therefore, any information that can aid the classroom teacher in her teaching of reading—a most complex process—is a helpful extension to existing literature. Information gleaned from past studies and from current successful classrooms can be useful in designing effective instructional programs as teachers develop and implement strategies for the teaching of reading. Qualitative studies allow educators to strengthen their understanding of the development of the reading process.

Statement of Problem

Research by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicates that many children have difficulty achieving success in reading. In a 2002 study the NAEP found that less than one third of the fourth graders tested scored at or above the proficient level of reading (Grigg, Daane, Jin, and Campbell, 2003). President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act, signed into law on January 8, 2002, is an attempt to address this deficiency by helping schools to improve reading instruction. The act calls for “the implementation of instructional programs and materials, assessments, and professional development grounded in scientifically based reading research” (No Child Left Behind: A Desktop Reference, 2002, p. 11). The impetus of No Child Left Behind

will lead to practical research studies conducted on a large scale. However, there exists a need for research that demonstrates how effective reading strategies are implemented in real classrooms. This is especially prudent as so much of the literature has emphasized the importance of the teacher and what she does in the teaching of reading.

As an elementary school principal and a former evaluator of teachers for a statewide assessment program, it has been my observation that many teachers of reading use the basal text and accompanying material for the crux of reading instruction. Those teachers who are more successful, i.e., those teachers who have students who enjoy reading and are able to read on grade level, employ a variety of strategies that both complement and enhance strategies recommended in teacher's manuals. By determining the methods used by effective teachers, their reasons for using such methods, the materials used, and the climate that they establish in their classrooms, models of effective teaching in reading can be developed that will have implications across grade levels.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to identify elements present in effective literacy instruction, i.e., those elements that fostered reading, speaking, listening, thinking, writing, and metacognitive skills. The identification of these strategies can assist reading teachers in development and implementation of effective instruction. Teacher beliefs and personal qualities, as well as materials used and the classroom climate were also studied. Reading specialists and administrators will find the results useful in developing professional growth activities for teachers of reading.

Setting

The school selected for this study is a private church school, Dodd Elementary (pseudonym), where I have served as the Head of School for the past four years. The school, with an enrollment of 292 students, has a reputation for an outstanding reading program and for meeting the individual needs of students. Built at the turn of the century, the facility which houses a preschool through 8th grade program, was once part of a private college that was used to house fighter pilots during World War II. Physically attached to the sponsoring church, the school is located in the historic district of an established city with over 200,000 residents.

The school has both an elementary and middle school building with a computer lab in each, a full-size gymnasium, and three playgrounds. The school library, located in the elementary building, has over 8000 books and is fully automated. Each classroom has an additional classroom library and utilizes the Accelerated Reader (Renaissance Learning, 2004) program. There are a minimum of three computers in every classroom. The school has recently undergone a technology project which put intra/internet connections in all rooms and created an in-house television station and radio station for the students. The school is able to use the church facilities for weekly chapel and special programs – Fellowship Hall, which has a full sized stage, the chapel, and the sanctuary.

This state accredited school established as a ministry of the church first opened more than thirty years ago. The school promises to provide *academic excellence in a Christian environment*. There are many success stories told by alumni and satisfied parents. Standardized test scores are a source of pride for the school, but perhaps the school's biggest claim to fame is the nurturing environment and the close-knit feel among

all present. Parents, students, and teachers refer to the *school family*. Newcomers often state that they felt the warmth of the school on their first visit and knew that this would be the school for them.

A recent survey of parents taken in conjunction with an upcoming Southern Association of Colleges and Schools review shows a high approval rate of administration and faculty, as well as of the overall program. One comment on the survey, typical of many, said:

My child has learned more than I ever imagined in a loving, caring environment. I could not be more pleased with her teacher. She has tremendous abilities as a teacher and an amazing love for all her students. I have also received excellent support from the administration. I don't know that you could improve our experience in any way – it's been perfect.

Another comment was,

Dodd School goes above and beyond to meet the special needs of students, both physical and intellectual. Dodd School has a staff that provides incredible nurturing, support, and encouragement for all students. Dodd School gives students the foundation to go forward and do well in the academic and social world after 8th grade. Dodd School is a special place with many special people.

The atmosphere of the school is, indeed, a positive one. Passing by classroom doors, one sees teachers interacting with students, smiling, and seeming to enjoy their work. One teacher remarked, "I love it here because I get to teach – I don't have to worry about all the red tape and hassles of other schools. I teach, and I love it."

Teachers at the school receive parental support in all endeavors. The majority of the staff has advanced degrees (more than 60%) and most have more than 15 years of experience. One teacher has been with the school since its beginning. Former students of all ages return to visit him when they are back in town.

Students must take an entrance test to be accepted into the school. School policies state that the school is geared for the average to above average student. However, often a student with below average reading scores is accepted due to high aptitude scores and the belief that this student has not been provided with appropriate instruction. There are many students of average ability with reading difficulties who attend this school for the special multi-sensory instruction that can be received on a pull-out basis. Currently forty-one students have Individualized Accommodation Plans as part of the 504 Program due to a learning disability.

Parents sign a yearly contract where tuition averages about \$6000 per year. There are two sections of each grade level. The Board of Trustees has set class size as follows: three-year old classes- twelve students; four-year old classes - fourteen students, kindergarten through 5th grades - sixteen students; sixth through eighth grade classes – eighteen students. Not all classes are filled to capacity, yet there are waiting lists for some classes.

Students in elementary school through the third grade are in self-contained classes. Students in the fourth and fifth grade are departmentalized with two teachers sharing core fourth grade duties and three teachers sharing core fifth grade duties. All elementary students receive special instruction in French, art, music, physical education, computer, and library. The school counselor visits with each elementary class weekly to cover such topics as conflict resolution, peer pressure, and self-esteem. Bible instruction occurs daily with a chapel service held weekly.

Students in the middle school have a seven period day. Each student takes an elective hour, which rotates on a nine-week basis. Topics for this course include

computer instruction, TV production, drama, art, creative writing, band, study skills, and geography. Foreign languages offered to middle school students include Spanish and French. Students are able to obtain two Carnegie units of credit for high school in the eighth grade – Algebra I and foreign language. Extracurricular activities include a variety of clubs (4-H, Student Council, National Junior Honor Society), sports (running club, basketball, cheerleading), and subject area organizations (French Club, Art Club, Book Club).

There are three special programs offered at the school – PACE, Discovery Learning Lab and Destination Imagination. PACE (Patriots Accelerated and Challenged to Excel) is a pull-out program for the academically gifted where the student pursues independent study. Discovery Learning Lab is a multi-sensory language program where students with identified reading disorders receive individualized instruction. Both programs have drawn students with special needs to the school. There are additional fees for students in the Discovery Learning Lab for individualized therapy received from a certified academic language therapist. Middle school students with identified language processing problems receive small group instruction on written expression as part of their curriculum in this lab. Destination Imagination is a creative problem solving program available to students in grades 4 – 8. Students in this program compete against similar teams from other schools and are able to advance to global competition—a feat accomplished by this school for the past six years.

The school calendar is filled with numerous events, from *The Giving Tree* – where each person at the school donates Christmas gifts to be used by a neighborhood school where students are less fortunate—to Fall Festival, Spring Musical, Talent Show,

Fifth Grade Quiz Bowl, Science and Social Studies Fairs, Middle School Retreat, Middle School Trip (which rotates Washington, DC, Boston, and Philadelphia), Field Day, Shadow Day (with mentors), and many more.

There are 48 adults on staff at this school. Thirty-five are full time employees which include teachers, three office personnel, a library clerk, and three teacher's aides. Twelve teachers work part-time. These are in the specialty areas – preschool enrichment, foreign language, band, Discovery Learning Lab, and higher math.

The student population is 96% Caucasian, 2% Black, and 2% Other. Thirty-five students receive financial aid to attend this school. The Board of Trustees has recently amended policy to provide financial aid for up to 100% of tuition in an effort to reach out to more students within the community. Families wishing to receive financial aid file an application with an outside firm which in turn makes recommendations to the school based on need. Additionally, the following discounts are given: children of ministers from the founding church attend free of charge, teachers' children attend the school with a 50% tuition discount, teachers' aides receive a 25% discount for their children, church members receive a small discount for their children (\$100), and families with more than 3 children receive a 10% discount on the third child and beyond.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that it has identified strategies used in literacy instruction by effective teachers. By exploring these teachers' beliefs concerning instruction it has become evident how these beliefs have actually shaped classroom practice. A close look at materials used for reading and the classroom climate also offers insight into the development of effective programs. This study expands the existing

literature on effective literacy instruction and allows the everyday practitioner to learn from these examples of success.

Research Questions

By examining variables that promoted literacy acquisition and achievement, a detailed account resulted which described classroom practice as related to teacher beliefs, strategies, materials, and classroom climate. The following questions were answered.

1. What are the strategies used by effective teachers in helping their students to read? Why are these particular strategies used?
2. What are the teachers' beliefs concerning literacy and how do these beliefs shape instruction? What are teacher characteristics/personal qualities that shape instruction?
3. What materials in addition to the basal are used most often by effective teachers in the teaching of reading?
4. What is the climate of classrooms with effective reading programs? What type of classroom management does the teacher employ? What is the teacher's role in the classroom? What is the relationship between teacher and students and between students?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research literature on effective literacy instruction has several recurring findings. The importance of the role of the teacher and the consensus that there is not one best method for the teaching of reading were the two most prominent conclusions (Bond & Dykstra; 1967/1997; Chall, 1967; Shanahan, 2003; Snow et al., 1998). Duffy and Hoffman (1999), both scholars in the field of reading, co-authored an article entitled “In pursuit of an illusion: The flawed search for a perfect method.” They summarize what many years of research has shown: “There is not one ‘perfect method’ for teaching reading to all children. Teachers, policy makers, researchers, and teacher educators need to recognize that the answer is not in the method but in the teacher” (p. 10). The importance of phonemic awareness and the incorporation of phonics into beginning reading instruction were shown effective by the studies throughout the years (e.g., Adams, 1990; Bond & Dykstra, 1967/1997; Chall, 1967; Ehri et al., 2001; Snow et al., 1998). Studies also indicate the need for the teacher to strike an instructional balance between explicit skill instruction and fostering students’ reading for meaning (Adams, 1990; Anderson et al., 1985; Flippo, 2001; Popp, 1975, Pressley, 2002). Learning to read is a complex process with many factors affecting student achievement.

Precursors to Student Achievement

Effective Teaching

Research on teacher behavior as it relates to student achievement has shown the need for direct instruction, continuous monitoring, performing multiple tasks simultaneously, appropriate pacing, and providing variety and challenge in work

assigned. A link between classroom management skills and effective instruction, as well as a connection between teacher expectations and student achievement, has been identified (Brophy, 1979). Characteristics such as setting high expectations, employing scaffolding, integrating subject matter, and providing clear purpose and direction are all examples of practices of effective instruction (Brophy, 1986; Porter & Brophy, 1988; Rosenshine & Stevens, 1984; Rupley, Wise, & Logan, 1986).

Porter and Brophy (1988) reviewed results from studies done at the Institute for Research on Teaching at Michigan State University. This research focused not only on the teacher behaviors, but also on the planning and decision-making processes that determined those behaviors. The authors concluded that effective teachers are reflective practitioners who analyze their own instruction and make informed decisions on practice; they accept responsibility for student outcomes and are aware of misconceptions that students bring to the learning environment. Teacher effectiveness was found to be linked to the goals for academic achievement that the teacher sets during planning and decision-making. Other factors relating to effective instruction are teacher knowledge of subject matter, instructional practices, and classroom management skills.

General instructional practices that enhance learning include direct instruction by the teacher, the use of small groups for instruction, and a task-oriented environment that is also warm and accepting. Specific instructional practices include demonstration, guided practice, independent practice, and performance feedback. Rosenshine and Stevens (1984) list three indexes of effective instruction: academic engagement time, content covered, and the success rate of students. As these indicators relate to reading, the authors reference correlational and experimental studies that offer methods for increasing

content covered. These methods include using small groups, increasing the time spent on instruction, providing succinct presentations, and questioning as teaching progresses. The authors state that experimental studies on academic-engagement time have not answered questions concerning the appropriate amount of time needed for success or provided definitive ways to increase academic-engagement time. In concluding, Rosenshine and Stevens “recommend more classroom-based experimental studies” in the area of effective instruction (p. 793).

Metacognition

Fisher (2002) defines metacognition as “the consciousness of your own cognitive process—in other words an awareness of what’s going on in your mind while you are doing something” (p. 63). Though teachers talk about *what* and *why*, rarely do they discuss *how*. Metacognition as it pertains to literacy is not often modeled by teachers, and the emphasis on performance does not encourage students to focus on the thought processes at work. Fisher cites the need for students to be aware of their own thought processes as they engage in the complex process of reading and writing. Careful reflection of their thought processes allows students to focus on learning.

Hall, Bowman, and Myers (2000) conducted a study with 60 nine-year-olds in Ireland to examine metacognition and reading. During interviews the students were asked to describe themselves as readers. The rating that most of the students gave themselves was aligned with their teacher’s rating of their ability. Better readers were able to give more detailed responses about their own ability. Students were also asked how one could become a better reader. The majority of the students said that practice made better readers. However, it was noted that the stronger readers “were distinguished by referring

to mental processes and motivational factors to explain how they concentrate and remember, thereby demonstrating more metacognitive awareness than their peers . . .” (p. 104). When asked what strategies they used when encountering difficult text, the better readers were able to explain strategies that they employed, whereas weaker readers could only list the strategies. Interviews with these students gave detailed descriptions of how classroom instruction had led to the development of these strategies. Hall et al. conclude that, “In the case of reading . . . learners ought to be helped not just to learn to read, but to become aware of how they learn to read” (p.106). They state, “One way of doing this is for the teacher to render the covert cognitive and metacognitive processes in overt form by thinking out loud while modelling [sic] the task. It seems that just modelling [sic] task completion is insufficient, for then the strategic activity will be largely unobservable, and the product, not the process, will be getting the greater emphasis” (p. 100).

According to Baker and Brown (1984), awareness of cognitive processes allows the learner to meet the demands of the learning situation. The self-regulatory actions employed during problem solving include checking, monitoring, planning, testing, revising, and evaluating. Crucial to the process are the remedial actions taken by the learner when needed. The effective reader defines the purpose for reading, is able to isolate the message of the text, monitors understanding, and takes compensatory action if necessary. As able students read for meaning, they monitor for comprehension, test their understanding of the text, and refine their assumptions about the text as more information is acquired. Possible remedial actions include re-reading, skimming forward, or seeking outside help. Comprehension failure occurs when readers lack necessary prior

knowledge, are unable to implement corrective action, or misinterpret the author's meaning. In the case of a poor reader, the student may be unaware that corrective action is even needed. This is due to the fact that children with metacognitive deficits focus on decoding rather than reading for meaning. Good readers, on the other hand, have automatic "triggers" which signal that adjustments are needed. If the reader's expectations about the text are not confirmed or if the reader encounters too many unfamiliar concepts, strategic steps are taken to remedy the situation. Rereading, using inferential reasoning, and using context clues are strategies implemented when good readers fail to understand text. Research has demonstrated that good readers modify their eye movements when faced with difficult text. Good readers adjust their reading behaviors based on their reason for reading whereas poor readers use the same behaviors regardless of their purpose for reading. Comprehension and retention can be indicated by the student's ability to summarize what has been read. The student's ability to delete unimportant and repetitive events, organize information, determine and/or create topic sentences are indicators of comprehension. Perhaps the most encouraging information gleaned from this research is the fact that metacognitive skills can be taught and that these skills can become internalized by the learner.

Kramarski and Feldman (2000) examined students' reading comprehension, motivation and metacognitive awareness using the internet. Using 52 middle school students, the researchers used metacognitive instruction embedded in internet activities with an experimental group that was randomly assigned. The control group had metacognitive instruction in a traditional setting. The authors identified three components of metacognitive knowledge: "declarative (knowing what), procedural (knowing how)

and conditional knowledge (knowing why)” (p. 150). Results indicated the experimental group scored significantly higher in motivation but the control group scored higher in metacognitive awareness; no significant differences in reading comprehension were found between the two groups. Although there were limitations to the study (e.g., small sample size and the limited duration of the study), these findings suggest that incorporating metacognitive skill instruction could be beneficial.

Allington (2001) discusses thoughtful literacy as the process individuals use to make connections to the texts that they read. By summarizing, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating what has been read, readers move beyond comprehension to internalizing what has been read. The teacher’s awareness of purpose is closely linked to thoughtful literacy and metacognition. Studies into the how and why exemplary teachers do what they do and students’ understanding of how and why they achieve can only help us determine more effective ways to teach reading.

Motivation

Motivation is an important variable in student learning and can be related to reading achievement. Variables such as developmental differences, the influence of the home environment, and socialization factors often affect learning. For example, younger children are more optimistic about achieving success after having experienced failure than are older students. The emphasis that parents place on reading or the value that peers place on learning contributes to the child’s achievement motivation (Wigfield & Asher, 1984). The interest level of reading materials affects motivation. Wigfield and Asher define high-interest reading material as material that creates an interaction between reader and text. The authors state that students are more motivated by high-interest

materials because these materials are better able to maintain their attention. Student performance in reading is affected by student attitude toward reading, the student-teacher relationship, and teacher expectations. Students who experience repeated failure develop a learned helplessness, whereas confident students are better able to attend to the task at hand. Having students attribute failure to insufficient effort seems to allow these same students to persevere when the next failure occurs.

Oldfather (2002) revealed that students could be motivated by empowering them to find intrinsic interest and personal relevance for learning. Her study was conducted with 31 fifth and sixth graders in a literacy classroom over an eight-month period. The students came from diverse backgrounds and had varying achievement levels. The study focused on students not initially motivated for the task at hand. Student responses to work in the classroom led to the development of three categories represented by the different types of engagement. The first group became intrinsically motivated by determining the “worthwhileness” of the project, choosing a positive attitude, and self-regulating their work. The second group performed the work likely from extrinsic motivation such as accountability systems in place in the classroom. The third group of students was neither intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated and they did not complete the assignments. These students demonstrated task avoidance and experienced negative feelings. Oldfather offered implications for assisting students who fell into the third category. She suggests an examination of the relationship between the students and the teacher and recommends open communication and an awareness of students’ physical and emotional needs. Oldfather asserts that optimal learning occurs when the teacher has established a feeling of community within the classroom and a nurturing environment. Oldfather concludes,

“If . . . we view the student as infinitely more important than the subject, we will be more likely to respond to children’s motivational struggles in ways that support their learning and empower and motivate them, rather than in ways that make them feel powerless and alienated” (p. 252).

Research on Effective Literacy Instruction

Study Summary

Block, Oakar, and Hurt (2002) conducted a qualitative study to develop a descriptive database of teaching expertise in literacy from preschool to grade five. The Delphi method was used in four phases to identify indices of exemplary teaching techniques, to ascertain whether researchers and practitioners agree on what those qualities are, and to determine if the qualities are specific to certain grade levels. The Delphi technique is a “statistical method for structuring a group communication process so that a group of individuals, as a whole, can describe complex phenomena by providing professional judgment and feedback to the development of agreed upon practices with complete anonymity” (p. 184). Phase I of the study compiled responses from 647 practitioners who met the following criteria: were members of the International Reading Association, were reading supervisors who had worked in the field for at least four years, had an advanced degree with specialization in elementary literacy, and had attended selected conferences or symposiums. These supervisors listed two qualities of an effective literacy teacher that they had observed for more than three years. In Phase II the data were collapsed into categories by creating dimensions based on statements that described the same indicator of teacher expertise. During Phase III domains of teaching expertise were identified. Summaries were written based on the data collected that gave

examples of teaching expertise at each grade level. This data was cross validated by researchers in Phase IV of the project. Seventeen university researchers identified as expert reviewers were asked to rank items for each grade level and to add items omitted from the original list. Twelve items were added to the list.

Study Findings

The study found 88 indicators of expertise with 44 of these indicators specific to grade levels. These characteristics were grouped into six areas: the instructional role of the teacher, the motivational strategies used, the methods used to reteach, the manner in which the teacher relates to students, the qualities that the teacher values in the classroom, and the lesson characteristics. The list of indices compiled and ranked by the two groups had 87% agreement.

The study also found that indices selected as most important in each grade were not so closely related in consecutive grades as they were in nonconsecutive grades. For example, lesson characteristics and qualities valued in the classroom were the distinguishing characteristics of expertise in preschool, second and fifth grade classes. Reteaching and motivation were ranked as the top two most important qualities in third grade.

Benefits

This study extends the knowledge of effective literacy instruction by indicating strategies that are grade specific. For example, the study concluded that preschool teachers focus on the whole child first before forging into literacy lessons. First grade teachers “teach literacy all day” (p. 190). Second grade teachers make extensive use of one-to-one conferences. Third grade teachers search for ways to have students become

self-motivated. Fourth grade teachers have the ability to “simultaneously instruct numerous students during the same lesson” (p. 204). Fifth grade teachers are able to create a balance between structure and independence in the classroom. All indices were listed by grade level with examples of how each was implemented. This study could be useful in developing materials for instruction or in developing instruments to be used for evaluation. It could also be helpful in the development of teacher training programs and in the placement of teachers, as administrators match talents to needs in the classroom.

Limitations

Although the list of expertise qualities generated by this study is extensive, it is not exhaustive. Implementation of identified strategies could benefit instruction; however, many other variables affect student achievement. Additionally, these findings are limited to the elementary grades; thus, this study provided no information regarding effective literacy instruction in middle or high school classrooms.

Study Summary

Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, and Mistretta (1998) conducted a qualitative study using observations and interviews to examine literacy instruction in nine first grade classrooms. Four suburban school districts participated in the study in which language arts coordinators nominated teachers considered outstanding and teachers considered typical. It was noted that the typical teachers were not considered weak instructors. Three of the districts were composed of students from middle to lower-middle income families. One district served upper-middle class students. Although specific criteria were not imposed on the coordinators for their selection of teachers, most cited the following as the basis for their selection: teacher behavior and enthusiasm, student enthusiasm for

reading, student reading and writing achievement, positive feedback from parents, teachers' ability to teach students with a wide range of abilities, teachers' responsibility for his or her own professional growth, and the supervisor's desire to have his own child in this teacher's classroom. Nine teachers, with two to twenty-five years of experience, were selected for the study. The authors used the supervisor nominations as a starting point for the selection of teachers. However, qualitative measures of student achievement determined effective literacy instruction and identified exemplary teachers. Data coding of these measures focused on reading and writing achievement and student engagement.

Study Findings

Most of the first grade classrooms used direct skill instruction and authentic literacy activities which are most commonly associated with whole language instruction. All of the classrooms supplemented their programs with trade books and had activities involving the writing process. Traditional methods included the use of spelling lessons and worksheets. Small group activities were usually teacher directed and parent participation was valued.

The high achievement teachers had additional characteristics that set them apart. These teachers had a deliberate integration of explicit instruction of basic skills with authentic reading and writing activities. The instructional density was also different with highly effective teachers incorporating multiple goals into single lessons and using extensive scaffolding. The effective teachers were able to assist their students in acquiring new knowledge by building on what was already known. Self-regulation was expected of the learners by the effective teachers, and these teachers encouraged meta-cognitive thinking through questioning techniques. Literacy learning was clearly linked

to content areas of the curriculum. All of the effective teachers held high expectations for their students, were excellent classroom managers, and maximized the use of outside resource teachers. The effective teachers planned well and had an “awareness of purpose” that separated them from the average teacher.

Benefits

This study focused on effective literacy teachers and the reasons for their effectiveness. The study listed the five characteristics which most distinguish exemplary teachers: “extensive use of scaffolding, encouragement of self-regulation, higher teacher expectations, expert classroom management, and awareness of purpose” (p. 122). Factors that were specific to literacy instruction included a blending of reading and writing activities and instructional balance.

Limitations

The small number of teachers studied and the fact that all were from the same region are two of the most obvious limitations. Moreover, the sample lacked diversity; all were from suburban districts. There was no control group with whom to test the hypotheses generated. The authors cite the lack of pretest measures and a lack of information on the relationship of school/district policies and teacher practices.

Study Summary

Pressley et al. (2001) conducted a follow-up to the Wharton-McDonald et al. (1998) study to address the identified limitations. Five teams of researchers observed and interviewed 30 teachers in five states. Again administrators were asked to nominate both exemplary and typical first grade teachers and researchers used student engagement and literacy achievement to determine which teachers were ultimately selected for the project.

Conclusions were drawn based on the data obtained for ten teachers—the one most effective and the one least effective teacher in each of the five sites. Over 221 teacher characteristics and behaviors were noted from observations and interviews. Researchers then identified those behaviors and characteristics found in exemplary classrooms.

Study Findings

Researchers identified 103 behaviors that were evidenced in the five most effective classrooms. These behaviors were summarized as follows: All effective classrooms were positive environments with balanced instruction (occurrence of both explicit skill instruction and immersion in literacy activities). Scaffolding was evident. Students were challenged through opportunistic teaching. Students were expected to self-regulate and there were strong interdisciplinary connections. Process writing was a major component of the program. Pressley et al. (2001) emphasized the “multiple instructional components articulated with one another” necessary for effective literacy instruction (p. 35).

Benefits

Pressley et al. (2001) argue that student engagement and actual reading and writing are critical factors in literacy acquisition. However, the authors emphasize that “effective literacy instruction is a complex interaction of components” (p. 49). Teacher education and staff development programs can benefit from this study in helping teachers to develop instructional styles that are proven effective.

Limitations

The authors claim that this study replicates the findings of the Wharton-McDonald et al. (1998) study; however, many of the limitations of the Wharton-

McDonald et al. (1998) study are still relevant. Although 30 teachers participated in the study, only 10 were used to develop conclusions. Standardized testing was administered in the Pressley et al. (2001) study. However, there was still no control group. The literature does not indicate the relationship between teacher practices and school/district policies. It is not possible to state that these findings are characteristic of all exemplary first grade classrooms.

Study Summary

Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole (1999) conducted a mixed method study to determine factors in the classroom and school that relate to reading achievement in the primary grades. Fourteen schools from throughout the United States were used in the study. Students in these schools came from average or low socio-economic backgrounds. The study examined school and teacher factors that were found to be critical in effective schools. Eleven of the schools selected were considered experimental because each had recently adopted reform measures or had “unexpectedly positive results with low-income populations” (p. 6). Three of the schools with similar populations were selected as the control group. These three schools had not implemented any reform measures nor did they have a high achievement record in reading. The researchers used gain scores from reading measures that they administered as well as achievement test scores provided by the districts to establish an empirical definition of effective schools.

Based on principal recommendation, teachers were nominated from each school for the study. Researchers rated these teachers based on their accomplishments using researched based checklists. One hundred four teachers were selected for this project. Principals participated in the study by providing information such as test scores and

demographics and by completing surveys and interviews. Four students from each classroom were used for the project. Two of these students were considered average performers by their classroom teachers and two were considered low performers. Testing done specifically for this study was administered by the researchers with the exception of spelling and writing assessments which were administered by the classroom teacher. Testing was done in November and in May which was specific to each grade level from kindergarten through third grade. Classroom observations were conducted by the research team with focused observations noting the teachers' interaction style, classroom environment, and materials. Teachers kept daily logs for two specified weeks of the study and were also asked to respond to a survey concerning instruction. At least three teachers from each school were interviewed. A case study was developed for each school and a list of teacher factors which impacted instruction was developed.

Study Findings

The study examined the relationship between school-level and classroom-level practices and concluded that not all teachers in the most effective schools were considered the most effective teachers. Because the bulk of the data focused on instruction in grades 1 – 3, kindergarten classes were dropped from the analysis.

Parental involvement was related to student achievement and school effectiveness. The four schools deemed most effective all had systemic assessment of student progress using classroom based assessment tools, reported collaboration between teachers, and cited the need for ongoing professional development. Three of the four most effective schools had interventions used across the primary grades that were research-based and externally developed.

Benefits

This study focused on both classrooms and schools by providing thick, rich descriptions of effective instruction. The observational data showed that effective teachers had outstanding classroom management skills with a high rate of student engagement. The study also showed that the collaborative model of instruction used by effective schools allowed more time for small group instruction. Although the groups were based on ability, these groups were flexible and changed often. Students in the most effective schools engaged in more independent reading, and a common instructional style used by effective teachers was coaching. The study concluded that the application of phonics skills for decoding while reading connected text was a characteristic of effective teachers and that higher level questioning enhanced student achievement.

Limitations

Although a strong correlation existed between teaching factors and student achievement, causal conclusions cannot be drawn. Trustworthiness could have been improved by including more students per classroom. The researchers could have increased construct validity of their measures of student achievement by using additional and a variety of assessment measures. Although the researchers acknowledged that the classroom-based assessments lacked standardization, they stated that a wider range of strategies and skills, particularly in the area of writing, would have given a more complete picture of literacy instruction. The authors recommend that further studies examine student response to literature and interaction with text.

Study Summary

Au and Carroll (1997) conducted a two-year study to examine a whole-literacy curriculum implemented in Hawaiian schools. The KEEP (Kamehameha Elementary Education Program) Demonstration Classroom Project had similarities to whole language; however, emphasis was placed on reading and writing without an equal emphasis on speaking and listening. Ability grouping based on skill level in the areas of vocabulary, decoding, and comprehension was used for reading instruction, and benchmarks were used to evaluate the program's effectiveness. The program utilized a constructivist approach in which the learner created knowledge rather than absorbing it from the teacher. Unique features of the program included ownership of reading, reader's and writers' workshops, and portfolio assessment based on established benchmarks. Thirteen teachers from seven schools participated in the first year of the program. Nine of these teachers continued and 20 additional teachers joined the second year. More than 60% of the students were Native Hawaiian and most came from low income homes. Grade levels included in the study were kindergarten through fifth grade. Working with consultants, teachers selected six students from their classrooms to be included in the study—two to represent each level (top third, middle third, and bottom third) of the class. Teachers used ability grouping in the primary classrooms and researchers were sensitive to instructional strategies that were culturally appropriate. Grade level benchmarks that addressed both process and product were used to assist in program evaluation. Data were gathered from classroom observations and achievement based on portfolio assessments. An audit was conducted on portfolios to ensure inter-rater reliability, and a checklist was developed and used to determine the degree of program implementation.

Study Findings

Aspects of literacy were identified with ownership of literacy selected as the overall goal. Reading comprehension, vocabulary, reading strategies, and independent reading were also considered. Although teachers and consultants stated that implementation was demanding, the checklist indicated that many elements of the whole-literacy project were implemented by the end of the first year. Based on feedback from the participants, classroom organization was the easiest part of the program to implement and portfolio assessment was the most difficult. Experienced teachers were more successful than novice instructors in program implementation. At the end of year-one, student achievement was determined by examining benchmarks achieved through portfolio assessment. The study found that 35% of the 234 students were above grade level and 53% were on grade level for ownership of writing. In attaining the goals set for process writing, 9% of the students were above grade level and 59% of the students were at grade level. Year-two results were very similar to those from year-one although the project had grown to include 547 students. The students of veteran teachers scored higher than new project teachers on meeting standards set using district benchmarks. Second year teachers required less support from consultants. The authors concluded that a constructivist approach can potentially improve student achievement, but full program implementation is a necessary prerequisite. However, Au and Carroll acknowledge the need to also include practices based on models of knowledge and skill development.

Benefits

Findings from the study have implications for literacy, instruction, and learning. Students can become empowered through ownership of their own literacy. Literacy takes

an active role in students' lives when students are proficient readers and writers.

Likewise, instruction focused on meaningful literacy activities is interesting to students and gives them a reason to learn necessary skills and strategies. Moreover, because establishing goals for learning directs instruction, frameworks and benchmarks provide the basis for skills and strategies to be presented.

Limitations

Although the staff exhibited enthusiasm for the program, many also stated that the project was difficult to fully implement. Teacher expertise is a major factor in program success. Support was needed from outside consultants and networking was needed for and by the participating teachers. Teacher education and the costs incurred in staff development would be considerations when implementing the program. Measures used to evaluate student achievement were based on locally developed criteria and standardization did not occur. The sample used in the study raises questions as to whether these findings could be extrapolated to different groups of children.

Effective Literacy Strategies

A ten year study conducted by Rona F. Flippo (2001) attempted to have experts in the field of literacy identify practices that facilitate reading. Flippo identified eleven experts—including Richard Anderson, one of the authors of *Becoming A Nation of Readers* (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985), Brian Cambourne, Edward Fry, Yetta Goodman, and George Spache—who varied in philosophies concerning the teaching of reading from traditional, whole language, or interactive approaches. Effective strategies included using “every opportunity to bring reading/writing/talking/ listening together so that each feeds off and feeds into the other,” using “a broad spectrum of

sources for student reading materials,” having “students engage in purposeful reading and writing,” and “using silent reading whenever possible” (p. 14). Flippo emphasized that no one method emerged as the best method for teaching reading. Rand Spiro, a researcher from Michigan State and a contributor to this volume, presented his views on literacy in the classroom based on his research with Cognitive Flexibility Theory. He stated, “I believe in the importance of employing multiple approaches, each coordinated with the others. Each paradigm for teaching reading and each theory of reading has strengths and weaknesses—the trick is to harness the strengths of each to counteract the weaknesses of the others. A byproduct of this kind of ‘principled eclecticism’ is that readers will become more flexible in adapting their own approaches to the needs of different reading situations” (p. 17). Spiro states that teachers need to make informed decisions about instruction that are guided by the individual circumstances. Students, likewise, should be able to make choices from an extensive repertoire of skills and strategies based on the context of reading. Spiro’s agreement with successful practices to teach reading listed in this volume underscore his belief in using situation-adaptive strategies to foster reading.

Gambrell and Mazzoni (1999) conceptualize literacy instruction as multifaceted—with the teachers’ role being that of “instructional designers who develop practice in relevant, meaningful ways for their particular community of learners” (p. 13). Based on current research, these authors have identified characteristics of best practices in literacy instruction. However, they caution that best practices do not exist in isolation but are context dependent. Using the constructivist theory supported by Poplin (1988), Gambrell and Mazzoni assert that literacy learning is an interactive process where learners are continually searching for and creating new meaning. Based on Vygotsky’s (1978)

concept of “zone of proximal development” the authors emphasize the importance of prior knowledge as the basis for all new learning. Effective teachers build on students’ understanding and offer challenge that is appropriate to this level of understanding, thereby scaffolding instruction. Citing the work of Johnson and Johnson (1983) and Slavin (1990), Gambrell and Mazzoni call for a collaborative approach to learning where students “actively and substantively engage in an exchange of ideas that result in co-constructed meanings” (p. 16). The authors use the research of Paris, Lipson, and Wixson (1983) to support their views on motivation. By providing activities that are of interest, students internalize learning.

Gambrell and Mazzoni list ten characteristics of effective literacy instruction. They contend that through informed decision making, educators should implement strategies that are appropriate for their learning environment. These research based practices are:

1. Teach reading for authentic, meaning-making literacy experiences.
2. Use high-quality literature.
3. Integrate a comprehensive word study/phonics into reading/writing instruction.
4. Use multiple texts that link and expand concepts.
5. Balance teacher- and student-led discussions.
6. Build a whole class community that emphasizes important concepts and builds background knowledge.
7. Work with students in small groups while other students read and write about what they have read.

8. Give students plenty of time to read in class.
9. Give students direct instruction in decoding and comprehension strategies that promote independent reading. Balance direct instruction, guided instruction, and independent learning.
10. Use a variety of assessment techniques to inform instruction. (p. 14)

Metsala and Wharton-McDonald (1997) cite eight characteristics of highly effective first grade literacy teachers based on the results of year-long research conducted as part of a project for the National Reading Research Center. Based on surveys of literacy competencies completed by teachers considered effective by their supervisors and long term observations and interviews the authors conclude that the following are elements of effective literacy instruction:

1. Instructional balance
2. Instructional density
3. Extensive use of scaffolding
4. Encouragement of self-regulation
5. Thorough integration of reading and writing activities
6. Masterful classroom management
7. High expectations for all students
8. Awareness of purpose (p. 520)

The strategies listed by Block et al. (2002) that are used by effective teachers included developing “effective instructional repertoires” such as scaffolding, “providing clear purposes,” relating “progress to previous learning,” and combining effective strategies (p. 182). Effective teachers revisited previously taught concepts. Highly

effective literacy teachers could be identified by “their automaticity in executing specialized teaching behaviors and self-regulated strategies” (p. 187). The most effective teachers used an integrated approach to instruction with single lessons having multiple goals. Effective teachers often employed scaffolding and relied on student self-regulation. Explicit skill instruction was balanced with reading and writing activities (Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998).

In the classes studied by Morrow, Tracey, Woo, and Pressley (1999) students had a variety of reading and writing experiences. Students were read to, did partner reading, oral reading, silent reading, and participated in guided reading groups. They wrote daily and in many different forms. The teaching of skills was done both explicitly and spontaneously. All “seized opportunities for teachable moments” (p. 468). Another strength of these teachers was their ability to integrate the curriculum to have “strong cross-curricular connections” (p. 469). All of the classes studied were in schools where collaboration was important and there was support from the administration. The individual classrooms had “literacy-rich environments” that “encourage[d] social interaction” (p. 464). The teachers studied had effective classroom management skills which showed evidence of careful planning of instruction and activities. A positive interaction was noted between teacher and students.

Au (1997) suggested several ways to assist teachers in incorporating constructivist, holistic principles—such as ownership and the use of meaningful literacy activities—into teaching. A shift from teacher-directed instruction to student-centered approaches has students creating their own knowledge instead of “absorb[ing] knowledge transmitted” (p. 203). By modeling the same processes of literacy that are expected of

students, the teacher makes a profound impression on students. Au encouraged teachers to “engage in the same literacy processes” (p.189), make literacy meaningful for students, involve parents, and develop a network of colleagues. She identifies portfolio assessments as one way to “promote students’ ownership of literacy” (p. 190-192). Au suggested the use of checklists for monitoring student success using standards and benchmarks as points of reference.

Pressley et al. (2001) found four indicators that distinguished the most effective teachers from the least effective teachers: (1) there was more explicit teaching and much of it “was opportunistic in response to student needs,” (2) an important goal of the teacher was to make students more independent, (3) there was more skills instruction, and (4) there was more process writing (p. 49).

Research conducted by the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) has provided insight into effective learning. Having strong connections with parents and using collaborative models for reading instruction have been two key findings. Additionally, coaching and high student engagement were also present in effective classrooms (Taylor et al., 1999). The most effective schools used small-group instruction more than whole-group instruction, focused on phonics instruction in the lower grades, and used higher level questions with students (Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002). Student achievement was lower if teachers told information rather than allowed students to discover information on their own. The study suggests a shift in instructional techniques may be warranted due to the fact that “higher level questions emerged as a significant predictor of growth in grades 4 – 6, while word work emerged most clearly in kindergarten” (p. 278).

Allington (2002) uses data from his decade of studying first and fourth grades to determine that reading achievement is the result of exemplary teachers responding to the individual needs of students. He states that these expert teachers know not only how to provide explicit instruction, but also how to “foster transfer of the strategies from the structured practice activities to students’ independent use of them while engaged in reading” (p. 744). Allington also cites the use of conversational talk, the assigning of more “substantive and challenging work,” and the evaluation of student work for effort and improvement—not just achievement—as characteristics of exemplary teachers (pp. 744-6).

Teacher Beliefs/Personal Qualities

In its position statement *Excellent Reading Teachers*, the International Reading Association (2000) provided a list of qualities that exemplary literacy teachers share. Understanding the child’s development in reading and writing was cited as critical knowledge needed by effective teachers. The teacher’s ability to shape instruction to meet individual needs was also listed. Personal attributes, such as being risk takers, being passionate about their subject matter, and being energetic, caring, and flexible were common among teachers deemed successful by their supervisors. These teachers believed that all students could be successful and understood child development (Block, Oakar, & Hurt, 2002). The most effective teachers had high expectations for their students and an “awareness of purpose” (Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998, p.121). The teacher’s style of interaction and encouragement of student’s active participation was important (Taylor et al., 2002).

Materials

Due to the fact that no one program for the teaching of reading or any particular set of commercial products has gained acceptance as the best to use, many researches agree that “a broad spectrum of sources for student reading materials” is most effective in the reading classroom (Flippo, 2001, p. 14). While effective primary classes are a print-rich environment, effective upper level classes offer “numerous selections of numerous genres so that every student can find a specific book with which to fall in love” (Block et al., 2002, p. 191). Teachers who consistently have high achievement in reading “consistently provided a wide variety of high-quality books (i.e., award-winning books and children’s classics)” in their classrooms (Wharton-McDonald et al., 1998, p. 112).

Allington (2001) emphasizes the need for appropriate reading material. He calls for extensive use of texts that students are able to read with accuracy, fluency, and good comprehension. He contends that “lots of easy reading is absolutely critical to reading development” (p. 44) with improved learning resulting from low error rates in reading. Allington suggests determining reading level of materials to match books to students. An effective classroom should have access to a large number of books that range in difficulty and genre, including magazines, series books, or other reading material of interest to students.

Classroom Climate

The research indicates that effective teachers build positive relationships with their students. Genuinely caring for their students and treating students with respect are two examples of how teachers build a positive classroom community (Au, 1997; Oldfather, 2002). Other elements of a successful classroom include a teacher who

encourages and supports students (Block et al., 2002). Wharton-McDonald et al. (1998) found that the most effective teachers had expert classroom management skills. “They were able to enrich their lessons based on student input without losing sight of the goals they had planned to address” (p. 120). Disruptive behavior was prevented by the students’ understanding and acceptance of expected behavior, thus leading to the maximizing of instructional time.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Philosophically, quantitative and qualitative research differ in the approach taken to explore research questions. Quantitative research is often considered scientifically based because the variables that are measured are done so in a quantifiable way—the basic element of analysis is numbers. Mertens (1998) states that it is a “process of creating an empirical test to support or refute a knowledge claim” (p. 59). Through deductive reasoning, the quantitative researcher uses instruments to test hypotheses and theories developed prior to the gathering of data. The researcher’s role in quantitative analysis is detached and impartial. Through component analysis, the quantitative researcher is seeking generalizability, prediction, and causal explanations.

Qualitative research involves the use of words instead of numbers to arrive at conclusions. It is focused on the process with the basic assumption that the problem is context dependent. Inductive reasoning is involved where the researcher seeks to interpret or understand the actors’ perspectives to reach a holistic understanding of the problem. The researcher’s role is one of active participation as the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2002; Creswell, 2003; Mertens, 1998; Tesch, 1990).

Another way to view these two types of research is to consider quantitative research as operating under a positivist paradigm and to classify qualitative research as falling under the realm of a naturalistic or interpretive/constructivist paradigm. In this view, positivism holds the underlying assumption that there is an objective reality in the social world. This type of research is an outgrowth of empiricist, rationalistic philosophy.

On the other hand, qualitative research has the underlying assumption that reality is socially constructed (Creswell, 2002; Creswell, 2003; Mertens, 1998; Tesch, 1990).

Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p. 15). A qualitative approach to research is more appropriate when multiple perspectives are involved and when it is important to study a situation in context. It is appropriate to use qualitative methods when there is a need for an in-depth view of the topic. Qualitative research is also the most appropriate method if the researcher is attempting to assess a process over a period of time or if the researcher wants to delve into the views of the participants (Creswell, 2002).

A qualitative method of research was selected for this study so that meaning and understanding could be derived in a holistic, natural framework. Qualitative studies have descriptive, narrative reporting that include the presence of the researcher and offer implications for use of the research and further study in that area. Pressley (2001) states, “Qualitative analyses of real reading instruction have produced many important insights about the complexities of teaching reading—the many elements in effective instruction, how the elements can relate to one another, and what should be measured to document the effects of instruction on young readers” (p. 19). This study concludes with an ethnographic case study that postulates possible scenarios pertaining to teacher personal beliefs/ qualities, instructional strategies, classroom climate, and materials.

Two classrooms were studied extensively where I adopted a Participant Observer stance as detailed by Spradley (1980). Spradley states that to understand others we must be able to “get inside their heads” (p. 10) using their behavior, their artifacts, and their messages as sources of information to develop inferences. Through this process, both explicit and tacit knowledge was obtained.

Data collection involved the use of primary sources (interviews, observations, and student and teacher work) and/or secondary sources (records, databases, etc.). Fieldwork included note taking and audio and video recording. Interpretive/constructivist research typically utilizes a purposeful or theoretical approach to sampling. Miles and Huberman (1994) list sixteen types of sampling commonly used in qualitative inquiry. These range from opportunistic sampling where the researcher follows up on unexpected information to snowball or chain sampling where key informants are identified. This study utilized a variety of sampling techniques, with a focus on intensity sampling, which involved “information rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely but not extremely” (p. 28).

Qualitative research involves data analysis that is ongoing. Tesch (1990) identifies the following practices for qualitative research analysis and interpretation: (1) analysis occurs throughout data collection process, (2) analysis is “systematic and comprehensive, but not rigid,” (3) accountability is provided through reflective notes, (4) data is subdivided into smaller units yet the researcher must look at the whole, (5) the process is inductive, themes emerge throughout the process, (6) comparison is the main analytic process used to refine categories and discover patterns, (7) modifications are made throughout study with flexible categories, (8) there is no standardized way to analyze data, (9) the procedure for analysis is not “scientific” but requires “intellectual

competence” and (10) the result of the analysis is a descriptive synthesis of a pattern, theme, or theory (pp. 95-97).

There are many analysis strategies commonly used in qualitative studies. One strategy involves a general review of the data with reflective notes to aid in sorting, followed by verification by informants. The data is then reduced by the use of metaphors and the creation of graphic organizers (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Another technique involves the use of categories or codes. A widely used technique involving the use of codes is the constant comparative model often used in grounded theory studies for testing the emerging theory against the data as it is collected. Using this model, saturation refers to review of data until the point is reached where no new information is provided. This involves probing for nonrepetitive and nonoverlapping statements and actions. Corbin and Strauss (1990) outline a procedure for analysis so that data can be grouped into meaningful units. This process involves the initial formation of categories (open coding), connecting those categories (axial coding), and providing a descriptive relationship between those codes (selective coding).

The primary method of qualitative analysis used for this study was the Developmental Research Sequence (DRS) Method (Spradley, 1980). This method calls for the researcher to have dual purposes in the field—engaging in activities in appropriate ways as deemed by the situation and acting as an observer. As the Head of School in the site selected for this study, I observed in two classrooms with which I am thoroughly familiar. It was necessary for me to disarm “selective inattention” and to pay close attention to details that would normally be filtered out by broadening the focus of

observation. I purposely focused on becoming “explicitly aware” of all components of these classrooms and leaving behind any biases. Having done teacher observations and evaluations as the Head of School, as a Curriculum Coordinator at a previous school, as a Master Teacher for a previous school system, and as an evaluator for the State Department of Education for a statewide assessment program, my specialized training allowed me to record what was observed in the classroom accurately. There were also benefits that arose from conducting a study in my own school. One of the main benefits was the ability to minimize effects of having an investigator in the classroom. Teachers and students alike were accustomed to having me visit their classroom. There was minimal observable reaction to my presence.

Spradley’s Development Research Sequence model begins with descriptive observations based on general questions. A grand tour observation in each of the two classrooms was the first step. During this time attention was given to the nine dimensions of a social setting: space, actors, activities, objects, acts, events, time, goals, and feelings. Questions such as, “How was the classroom arranged? What activities are occurring? How long did each take? Who was involved?” guided the observations. Noting details about these dimensions led to thick, rich descriptions of the classes. Using information from the grand tour observations, questions were developed for more focused observations, designated as mini-tour observations. These observations were more specific and were an outgrowth of the earlier grand tour observations. Using Spradley’s descriptive question matrix, in which the questions are developed concerning the relationship between dimensions, the manner in which these dimensions were interrelated began to emerge. For example, focused observations were guided by questions such as:

How were the different areas in the classroom used by the students? What goals were set for the students? What goals did the teacher set for herself? What activities are the students doing? With information gleaned from these focused observations, selected observations followed which focused on a particular element of the observation.

Spradley's model is cyclic – asking questions, making descriptive observations, collecting and analyzing data—using analysis to form new questions. Domain Analysis, the first type of ethnographic analysis in the DRS Method, involves identifying patterns from the observations. This was done by identifying the parts of the cultural domain (categories of meanings) and determining how these parts were organized. Three basic elements were defined for each domain: the cover term (the name for the cultural domain), the included terms (the smaller categories), and the semantic relationship (the linking together of the categories). For example, based on a classroom observation, the cover term for the teacher's behavior was Teacher Acts. The smaller categories included the terms lecturing, modeling, facilitating, assisting, prodding, maintaining order, keeping peace, reminding, motivating, congratulating. All of these included terms were examples of the kinds of acts in which the teacher engaged. Specifically, the semantic relationship between the categories was that lecturing is a kind of teacher act. In completing a domain analysis, identified domains were revisited each in an effort to identify all semantic relationships.

Domain analysis was repeated throughout the study as new data were collected. Structural questions were developed which incorporated the relationship of the domain with the cover term. Information from this step provided the focus needed for more in-depth observations based on those structural questions. When needed, both formal and

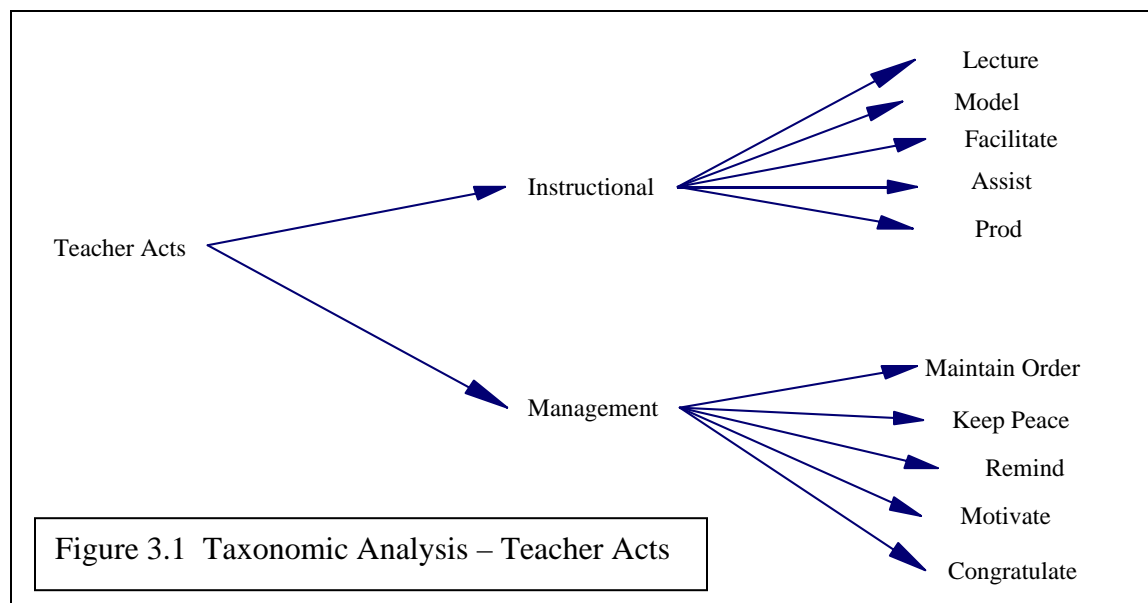
informal interviews were held to clarify observations. For example, the following domains emerged for the structural questions: What type of assessments occur? What teacher behaviors are linked to assessment?

Domain Analysis – Assessment

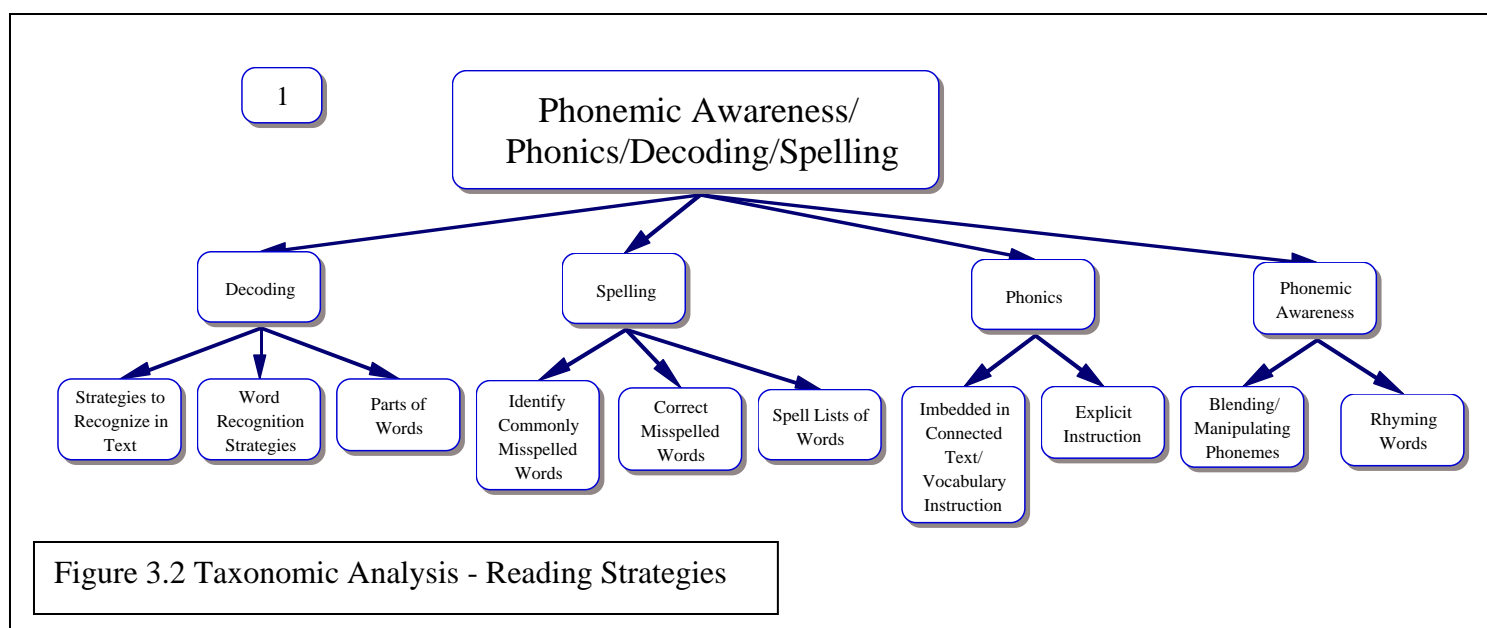
Table 1: Types/Teacher Behavior		
<u>Informal Assessments</u>		<u>Formal Assessments</u>
Homework		Tests
Questions after Reading		Assigned Writing
Monitor as Reading		Running Records
Act Out Vocabulary		Illustrate Vocabulary
Monitor as Follow on Tape		Paper Bag Assessment
Uncover Misconceptions		Brochure
<u>Feedback</u>	<u>Adjust Teaching</u>	<u>Strategies (given to students)</u>
Specific Verbal Praise	Re-Teach	Limit Choices
Have Students Correct	Re-Visit	Read Questions First
Affirmation	Small Group	Tear Apart
Ask for Additional Information		

The second type of data analysis in the DRS Method is the taxonomic analysis which reveals the relationship between subsets and the whole. During this step, a search was conducted for similarities based on the same semantic relationships. Focused observations assisted in determining if tentatively selected taxonomies were complete. For example, the previously mentioned domain of Teacher Acts with ten included terms were divided into two subsets: Instructional and Management. In this taxonomic analysis, lecturing, modeling, facilitating,

assisting were placed under the subset of Instructional Teacher Acts. Prodding, maintaining order, keeping peace, reminding, motivating, congratulating fell under the realm of Management.



Structural questions pertaining to instructional strategies used by effective literacy teachers led to the development of six domains: (1) Phonemic Awareness/Phonics/Decoding/Spelling, (2) Vocabulary Development, (3) Comprehension/ Understanding Text, (4) Fluency, (5) Writing, and (6) Assessment. A taxonomic analysis of these six domains led to the following:



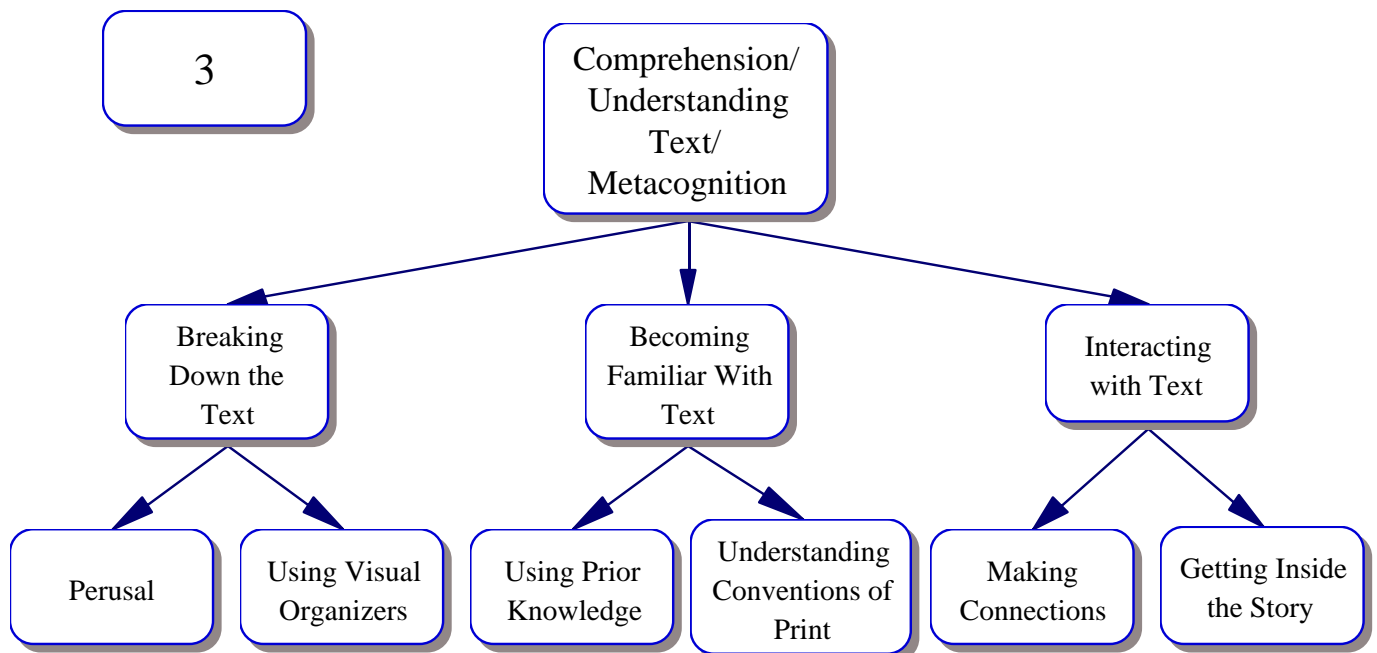
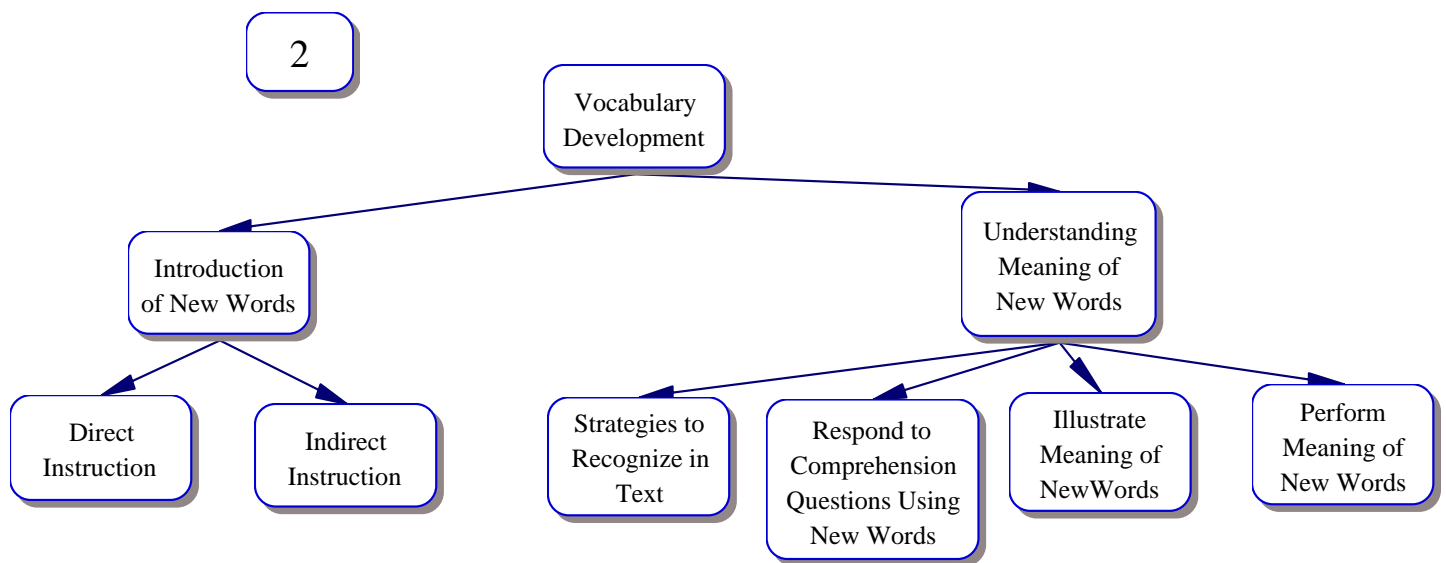


Figure 3.3 Taxonomic Analysis – Reading Strategies *Continued*

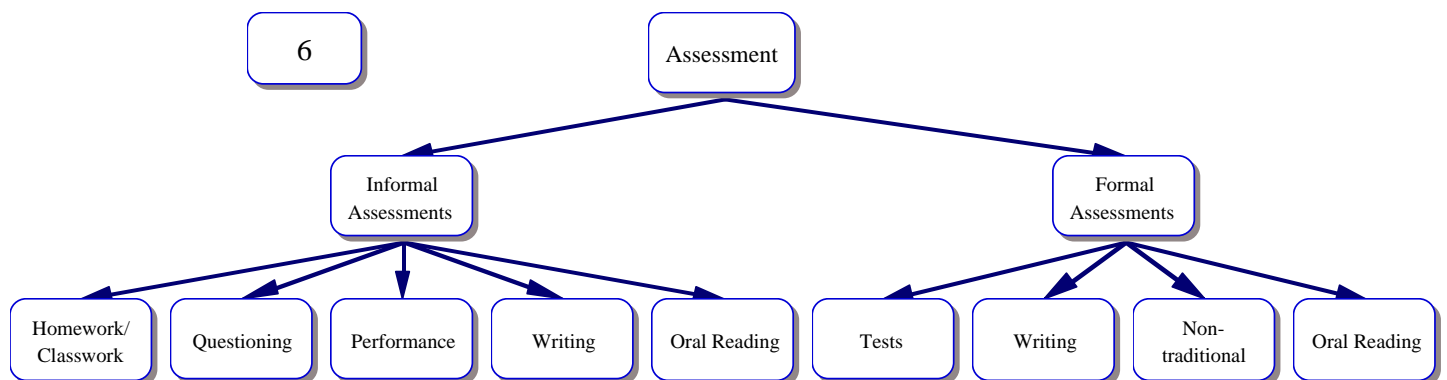
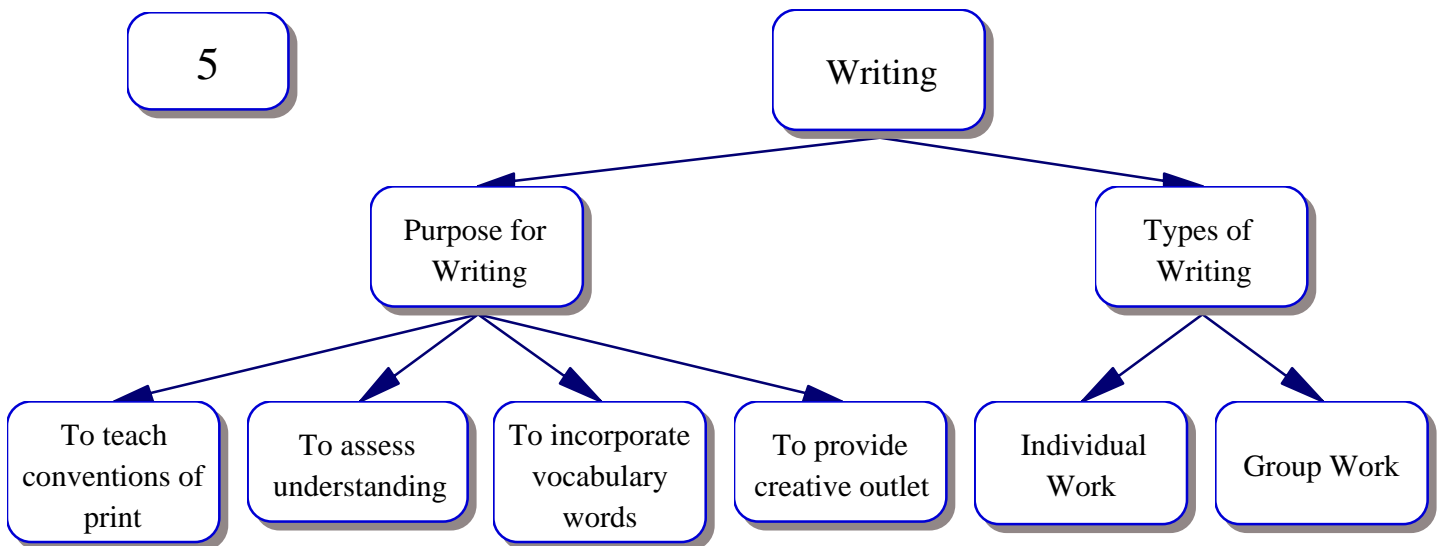
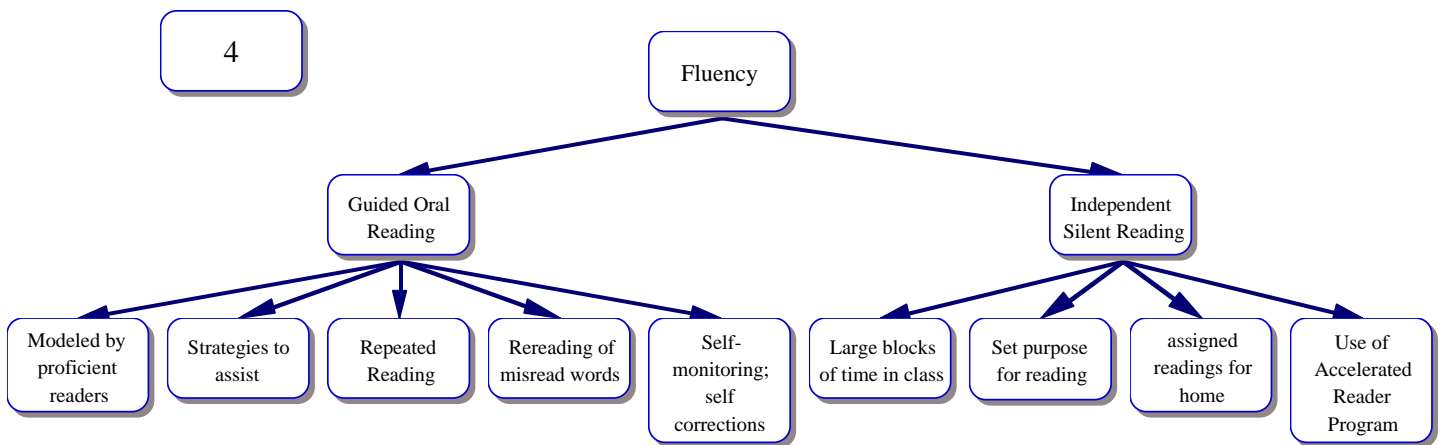
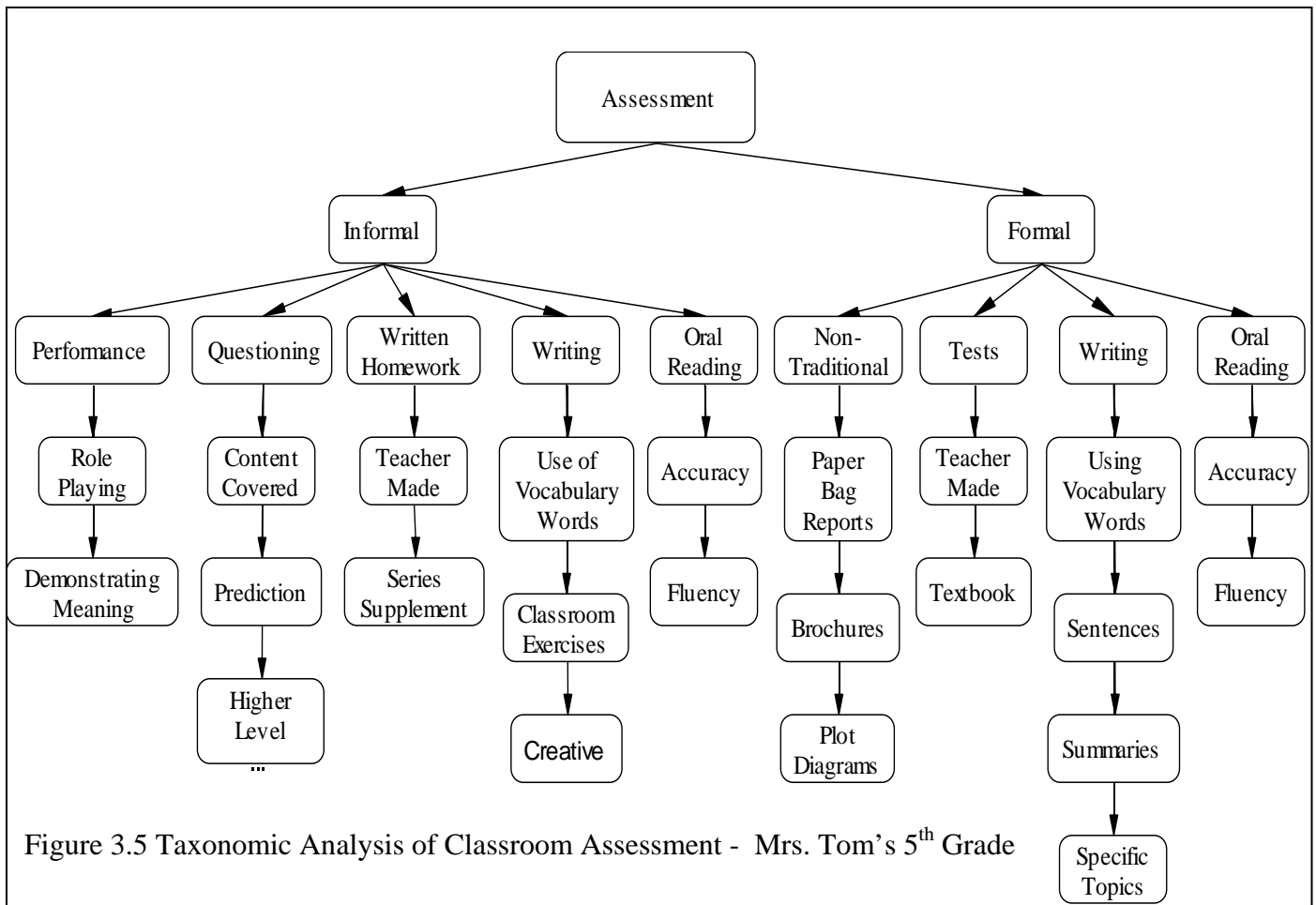


Figure 3.4 Taxonomic Analysis – Reading Strategies *Continued*



Further taxonomic analysis of the assessment domain led to the data shown in Figure 3.5.

In addition to descriptive and focused observations, the DRS Method calls for selective observations. These observations were narrow in focus and searched for specific contrasts within cultural categories. Selective observations were preceded by the formation of contrast questions based on uncovering these differences. Highlighting these differences led to the next step of the sequence, componential analysis, the systematic search for attributes within cultural categories. These attributes were components of meaning that had binary values. For example, when analyzing materials used by first grade students during literacy activities, this componential analysis was the outgrowth of the following questions: Which activities involve the use of solely student-generated materials? Which activities involve the use of linguistic patterns?

Student Activities	Writing	Reading	Drawing	Group Work	Follows Linguistic Patterns	Totally Student Generated
Writing Sentences	+	-	-	-	+	+
Writing Lists of Words	+	-	-	-	-	+
Reading from Overhead	-	+	-	-	-	-
Reading from Group Sentences	-	+	-	-	+	+
Reading from Textbook	-	+	-	-	+	-
Drawing Individual Pictures	-	-	+	+	-	+
Drawing Murals	-	-	+	+	-	+

Figure 3.6 Componential Analysis – Mrs. Harry’s Room

Spradley suggests the completion of a paradigm worksheet so that the researcher can return to selective observations to unearth those elements of information that are still elusive. A completed paradigm worksheet allowed for a succinct presentation of the information.

Paradigm Worksheet for Effective Strategies

The following is a summary of classroom practice:

- I. Phonemic Awareness/Phonics/Decoding/Spelling
 - A. Phonemic Awareness
 1. Rhyming Words
 2. Blending/Manipulating Phonemes
 - B. Phonics
 1. Explicit Instruction
 - a. structured synthetic phonics
 - b. defining of operational terms

- c. alphabetic principle
 - 2. Imbedded in Connected Text/Vocabulary Instruction
 - a. applying prior knowledge
 - b. making sense of unfamiliar words
 - C. Decoding
 - 1. Word Recognition Strategies
 - a. configuration of letters
 - b. mnemonic devices
 - c. parts of speech; tense
 - 2. Parts of words
 - a. root words, suffixes, prefixes
 - b. identifying patterns
 - c. number of syllables
 - d. identifying syllables
 - 3. Strategies to Recognize in Text
 - a. context clues
 - b. multiple meanings of words
 - c. homonyms, homographs, homophones
 - D. Spelling
 - 1. Correction of Misspelled Words
 - 2. Identification of Commonly Misspelled Words
 - 3. Learn to Spell Lists of Words
- II. Vocabulary Development
- A. Introduction of New Words
 - 1. Direct Instruction
 - a. presentation in written form
 - b. using in activities
 - 1) make flashcards
 - 2) put in alphabetical order
 - 3) use in sentences/paragraphs/stories
 - 4) identify parts of speech
 - 2. Indirect Instruction
 - a. using in natural conversation
 - b. inclusion in written work
 - B. Understanding of Meaning
 - 1. Illustration of Meanings of New Words
 - 2. Performing Meanings of New Words
 - 3. Responding to Comprehension Questions Using New Words
 - 4. Strategies to Recognize in Text
 - a. visual clues
 - b. "looks right"
 - c. idioms
 - d. sight words (drill/familiarity)
- III. Comprehension/Understanding Text/Metacognition
- A. Comprehension/Understanding Text
 - 1. Breaking Down the Text
 - a. perusal
 - 1) skimming

- 2) SQ3R
 - 3) table of contents
 - 4) using illustrations
 - 5) shared book experience
 - b. using visual organizers
 - 1) beginning, middle, end
 - 2) plot diagrams
 - 3) four column summary
- 2. Becoming Familiar with Text
 - a. using prior knowledge
 - 1) linking to past learning
 - 2) linking to other areas in the curriculum
 - 3) using multiple modalities
 - b. understanding conventions of print
- 3. Interacting with Text
 - a. making connections
 - b. getting inside the story
 - 1) role playing
 - 2) identifying character traits, feelings
 - 3) relating to real life

B. Metacognition

- 1. Modeling by Teachers
- 2. Involving Higher Level Thinking Skills
 - a. predicting
 - b. synthesizing
 - c. summarizing
 - 1) answering questions orally
 - 2) written responses to literature
 - d. evaluating

IV. Fluency

A. Guided Oral Reading

- 1. Repeated Readings
- 2. Self-Monitoring; Self-Corrections
- 3. Re-reading of Misread Words
- 4. Modeled by Proficient Readers
 - a. teacher
 - b. peer
 - c. audio tape
- 5. Strategies to Assist
 - a. paired reading
 - b. popcorn reading
 - c. choral reading
 - d. peer tutor
 - e. shared book experience
 - f. taped readings
 - g. identifying rhythm of text
 - h. student performance/role playing

B. Independent Silent Reading

- 1. Large Blocks of Time in Class

2. Assigned Readings for Home
 3. Use of Accelerated Reader Program
 4. Setting Purpose for Reading
 - a. For enjoyment
 - b. For information
- V. Writing
- A. Purpose for Writing
 1. To Teach Conventions of Print
 2. To Assess Understanding
 3. To Incorporate Vocabulary Words
 4. To Provide Creative Outlet
 - B. Types of Writing
 1. Individual Work
 2. Group Work
- VI. Assessment
- A. Informal Assessments
 1. Homework/Classwork
 - a. teacher-made
 - b. series supplement
 2. Questioning
 - a. content covered
 - b. prediction
 - c. higher level thinking skills

The next step in this sequence involved the describing of cultural themes. This was achieved by developing a holistic understanding of the culture, yet using an in-depth analysis of domains. Spradley (1980) defines a cultural theme as “any principle recurrent in a number of domains, tacit or explicit, and serving as a relationship among subsystems of cultural meaning” (p. 141). Although cultural themes can be generalized, it is not necessary that they apply in every situation. Additionally, more than one theme is generally present in a culture. Therefore, the goal was to uncover a set of themes that were present in effective literacy instruction guided by the research questions. Domain, taxonomic, and componential analyses may be done simultaneously. The cultural inventory, a review of all notes as the study is ongoing, assisted in determining gaps of information for additional observation and helped determine ways to finalize the report.

Several strategies were available for analyzing themes: immersion (spending extensive time), developing a componential analysis of cover terms for domains, determining larger domains that include the cultural scene, searching for similarities among dimensions of contrast, and writing a summary overview of the cultural scene.

The DRS Method utilizes a cultural inventory as a way of summarizing findings before the actual writing of the report. By reviewing all notes and visualizing the cultural scene as a whole, missing pieces of information that could be discovered with further observation were identified. The cultural inventory involved listing all cultural domains, reviewing all analyzed domains—including those which have only a partial taxonomic or componential analysis or no systematic analysis at all, and making a list of themes. Additionally, cultural inventories were assisted by naming or writing short descriptions of examples of events and experiences observed that related to significant domains. These steps led to the identification of organizing domains which became the structure for the written report and the guide for additional research.

The final step of the DRS Method was the writing of the ethnographic case study. This involved a translation of what was learned and a communication of those meanings through several levels of writing. The most basic level involved the writing of universal statements which were broad and all-encompassing. For example, this level covered aspects found in most classrooms. The development of cross-cultural descriptive statements was the second level. Statements that set the classrooms studied apart from the average classroom were highlighted. A general statement about classrooms of this type made up the third level. The fourth level included general statements about the specific classrooms studied followed by specific statements about domains and, lastly, specific incident statements. The report included writings on all levels, from the general to specific, in varying degrees of abstraction.

Framework

Two elementary reading teachers identified as effective were used for this study. The criteria for selection included a review of documents available at the school such as observation forms, professional growth plans, and student records. Oral and written communication from parents were also taken into consideration for this selection. Additionally, a Likert scale was developed based on the ten indicators of effective literacy instruction as outlined by Gambrell and Mazzoni (1999) and used to evaluate all reading teachers at the school (See Appendix A). These two teachers scored highest on this instrument. The two classrooms involved in this study are a first grade classroom and a fifth grade classroom.

The first grade class is self-contained and is comprised of nine students. Eight of these students are European American. One student is African American. One student comes from a home where the parents have recently divorced. All others come from homes where the family is intact. All students receive strong support from their families. Based on the testing given by the school for entrance, there was not a significant range of ability in this class though individual needs vary greatly. One child has been identified as academically gifted and participates in a pull out program three times a week. Another child has been identified with language processing problems. He receives therapy from an occupational therapist twice a week and outside tutoring from a certified academic language therapist. Two other students had difficulty in kindergarten working with the school's phonics program but are considered bright children based on previous teacher evaluation. Although reading does not come so easily to these three students, the first grade teacher feels that their progress has been satisfactory. The other five students have exhibited no difficulty with reading.

The teacher, Mrs. Harry (pseudonym), is in her second year at the school having retired from the public school system after serving nineteen years as its elementary reading supervisor. In this capacity, she worked with classroom teachers helping them to implement research-based teaching practices. She was also instrumental in developing the reading curriculum for her parish, one of the largest parishes in the state. Prior to this, Mrs. Harry taught eighteen years in the elementary grades. She has more than thirty graduate hours above a Master's degree. In addition to certification as an elementary teacher, Mrs. Harry is certified as a reading specialist, elementary principal, and parish or city school supervisor of instruction. She considers herself a lifelong learner. She keeps abreast of the literature in her field and regularly attends workshops and conferences. Mrs. Harry presented at a regional reading conference in December.

Mrs. Tom (pseudonym) teaches reading to the fifth grade class used for this study. In her eighth year of teaching, she is currently working on her Master's Degree. As a military wife, she has taught in three different states. At Dodd Elementary, she also teaches the academically gifted and coaches Destination Imagination, an international problem solving program. Mrs. Tom considers herself a lifelong learner and takes responsibility for her own professional development. She was asked to serve on the school's Strategic Plan Committee by the Board of Trustees because of her "ability to think out of the box." She was featured by the local television station as the *Teacher of the Week* and has been nominated for the Disney Outstanding Teacher Award.

There are 12 students in the classroom, all of them European American. Three of the students have been identified as dyslexic and have a 504 plan of modifications and accommodations in place at the school. One student, new to the school this year, has moderate articulation difficulties and receives speech services through the local school

system. Her pronunciation of many words is distorted and she often speaks in a very subdued voice. Three students have been identified as academically gifted. Standardized test scores from the previous year on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills show total reading scores that range from the 62nd percentile rank to the 94th percentile rank. Core battery scores ranged from 73rd percentile rank to the 99th percentile rank. Composite scores ranged from 74th percentile rank to 99th percentile rank. All students live in two-parent homes, although one student's home includes a step-father. This student's biological father lives in another city. All students have strong family support.

A total of 70 visits (of 45 minutes to one and one-half hours in length) were spent (35 visits with each teacher), either through classroom observations or interviews, occurring between Dec. 1, 2003, and February 28, 2004. Data sources included samples of student products, student assessments, teacher lesson plans, and transcriptions of field notes and interviews. Audio taping and video taping also occurred. During observations, focus was given to teacher and student tasks. Attention was given to instruction in reading for various skills, such as comprehension and decoding and—based on Bloom's taxonomy—the cognitive complexity involved. Observations also yielded data concerning assessment strategies, classroom environment, and products used by the teachers and products produced by the students. A representative sample of student work was collected from all students at least twice a week with a minimum of twenty samples gathered from each class. Teachers were interviewed to discuss their selection of strategies and their beliefs and philosophies concerning literacy. Informal interviews with both students and teachers occurred as the need arose to gain insight into work, comments, or reactions.

Standards

The quality of a study is dependent upon the data collected. In this qualitative study, the following standards were met: dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

Dependability, which parallels reliability in a quantitative study, assures quality and appropriateness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). An external auditor conducted dependability audits throughout the study using my raw notes, analyzed notes, transcripts of observations and interviews, student work, and teacher work. This external auditor is a colleague from another school who has a complete understanding of the subject and procedures to be used and completed a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Curriculum and Instruction with a specialization in reading. She is recognized by her peers as an instructional leader.

Credibility determines if the measurements are true indications of what was intended to be measured. This standard parallels internal validity in a quantitative study. Triangulation, member checking, prolonged engagement, and peer debriefing were used for validating the accuracy of findings. Triangulation involved the examination of information using multiple data-gathering strategies—observations, interviews, artifacts. Member checking was both formal and informal, and involved sharing findings with those involved for confirmation and to discover areas in need of further study. Prolonged engagement with persistent observation prevented premature closure. Peer debriefing and extended discussions with fellow graduate students and colleagues assisted in identifying areas that needed further study.

Transferability parallels external validity in quantitative studies (Mertens, 1998). Transferability refers to the extent to which the results of a study may be applied to other

situations. The use of rich, thick descriptions can assist others seeking to decide if findings from this study are applicable to their particular setting.

Finally, confirmability seeks to reduce biases of the researcher by tracking data and confirming conclusions. Freedom from bias in data collection due to race, gender, ethnicity and/or disability was verified by member checking and the external auditor. The external auditor also verified objectivity by examining the audit trail of documentation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The proper procedures were followed regarding permission to undertake this study. Permission was received from the Board of Trustees of the school to be studied, from the teachers involved, and from the parents and students involved in the study (See Appendix B, C, D, & E). Trustworthiness has been demonstrated by satisfying all of these standards—dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

CHAPTER IV

THE GRAND TOUR

Mrs. Harry's Room

In her second year of teaching at the school, Mrs. Harry came to Dodd Elementary after retiring as Reading Supervisor of the local parish system. Having been my mentor in the public school realm, I was delighted to have the opportunity to watch her teaching in action. An upbeat and energetic individual, she is highly regarded for her work ethic. Typically arriving before seven and not leaving until dark, Mrs. Harry spends countless hours planning and preparing for unique learning experiences for her students. She spends an inordinate amount of her own money on materials to use in her classroom. Her classroom library is extensive, yet she seems to add to it weekly.

Mrs. Harry's reputation as a positive influence on children is evident and is especially appreciated by parents. After a visit from an outside speaker to the classroom, one of the students remarked, "I wonder if they knew who we were?" When Mrs. Harry asked for clarification, the child said, "You know, the smartest kids in the school!" This is a comment that Mrs. Harry often makes to her students.

Mrs. Harry's classroom is colorful, attractive, and filled with materials to assist with learning. Her extensive literature collection is the culmination of many years of collecting trade books that focus on specific skills, units, or themes. The room, originally used for Sunday School by the church, has a main room (approximately 30' x 20') and has three side rooms which she has turned into a reading center, a writing center, and a math/science center. The reading center has numerous books on two over-sized shelves, a table with paper and writing tools, an easel for big books and a child-sized podium. The

writing center has three computers and writing apparatus. The math/science center has manipulatives, more books, and exploratory type objects (rocks, shells, magnifying glass, etc.). There is also a computer in this room. There is a computer in the main classroom that has intra/internet access and the Accelerated Reader (Renaissance Learning, 2004) program.

The hallway outside of the classroom is used to display student work. Individual writings and artwork and class murals are on display. The door to the classroom is decorated seasonally with artwork by the students that relates to a lesson. The door decoration changes monthly. Nearly every available wall space of the main classroom is used. The teacher's desk is in the back of the room, with the bulletin board behind it set up as a behavior chart. Mrs. Harry's management system is systematic and effective. (Students have 5 sticks placed in their pocket on the board at the start of each day. When violating a rule, the student must "pull" a stick. However, students are allowed the opportunity to regain the stick.) Mrs. Harry did not make use of the board, i.e., have a student relinquish a stick, during any of the observations. On that same wall was a display of student work, a color chart, and a birthday chart. On the east wall of the room was the *meeting board* used in conjunction with the math program. A current calendar, number chart, pattern chart, days of the week chart, and months of the year chart made up this section. The alphabet chart was above and stretched across this wall. On the adjoining wall was a bulletin board that changed several times during this study. In December, items were added daily as students learned about Christmas symbols. In January, a huge hill of snow was decorated by snowmen (children's artwork) and snowmen stories that were part of the grammar lesson. In February the board featured the

theme *Love to Write*. Patriotic writings were also featured as the school celebrates Patriots' Day in February. The board next to it was entitled *Super Work* and had the individual work of students posted. On that same wall was the *Top Dog* table where Mrs. Harry highlighted a different student each week. Here the student brought pictures from home, including baby pictures, those of family, and pictures of pets, hobbies, vacations, etc. Some of the student's favorite books and toys were also on display. An overhead projector was near the front of the room and Mrs. Harry used this for her whole group instruction. Phonics rules were posted next to the screen. There was a table under the screen that was filled with stuffed dogs. A CD player was also on the table. Often Mrs. Harry would say to the students, "Let me put on some thinking music," and would turn on a classical CD. The corner of the west wall held a small table with Bibles for each student and the flags (American and Christian) on display.

The room arrangement of the desks changed twice during the study. In December, the desks for the nine students were grouped as follows: five were grouped together in the center of the room and the other four were spaced around the group at each corner. None of the students had their backs to the overhead and board. In January, the desks were set up in two rows. The first row had four students facing the front with two students on each side, desks touching. The second row had three desks touching facing front. Each student had a pencil box, books, paper, and other items in their desks. On several occasions I witnessed students pull out a small booklet entitled Words I Use When I Write (Trisler & Cardiel, 1989) to help with the spelling of words in their writing. This book contained frequently used words. The book was arranged so that there was a page for each letter of the alphabet. There was space for students to add words not listed. On the shelf under the

television, there were cans that held supplies that the students were free to get up and use as needed.

Mrs. Harry never raised her voice during the observations. Several times throughout the observation she referred to her students as *clever*. It was amusing to hear the students use the same term often in their speech when referring to an author or illustrator. It was obvious to me as I watched Mrs. Harry that she enjoyed her students and her work. It was apparent that the students had a good relationship with her.

Although an entrance test is required for enrollment and all of the students are average or above in ability, the nine students in this classroom have unique needs. The academically gifted student is able to read whatever Mrs. Harry asks her to read. She writes exceptionally creative, long stories. The student with the language processing difficulty, who also receives occupational therapy, is extremely bright. His answers to Mrs. Harry's questions are often deep and display reflection. Mrs. Harry allows him time to think and values his responses. Two other boys in the class have a very difficult time remaining in their desks. Though they often move about the room, both complete whatever task is assigned and are very bright. Both of these boys have good decoding skills and are able to read well. The remaining five girls are above average academically. Parental support is positive. Mrs. Harry expressed her delight that every child's mother and nearly every father showed up for conference day held in the fall.

Vignette: February 17, 2004

Students start the lesson by gathering around Mrs. Harry as she reads orally to them. The trade book that she has selected is Nate the Great (Shamat, 1977), chosen because the lesson for this day focuses on words with the *long a* and *silent e* (called the

sneaky e by the class). As she reads, she pauses occasionally to be certain that students know the meaning of words that may not be familiar to them. “What does he mean when he said he *trudged* on to work?” She also pauses to check comprehension using recall questions and questions pertaining to predictions. Mrs. Harry calls on one student, who is never quick to answer, but generally gives detailed responses. She asks him what he thinks is up in the tree. After an extended pause he responds, “Probably a bat, because they sleep in the daytime. It wouldn’t be a bird because it has been a long time. By now, the bird would have gotten bored and he would fly away . . . so it has to be a bat.” Mrs. Harry and the students have given him their full attention. Mrs. Harry praises him for his response and asks other students for their thoughts. She makes a positive comment regarding each response.

After completing the story, Mrs. Harry introduces a poem to the students which also involves the same vowel pattern. She reads a line or two at a time and calls on a student to reread that same verse. She then moves to the overhead as students return to their desks. She has this same pattern written on the overhead with blank lines as follows: What starts with a _____ and rhymes with _____? _____’s the girl/boy who’s never _____. Students work through the poem giving Mrs. Harry words to fill in the blank. For example: What starts with a j and rhymes with lake, Jake’s the boy who’s never baked.

Mrs. Harry asks the students to use the letter cards that they have out to make the word Jake. She says, “Now change the word to cake.” One student asks if cake starts with a c or a k. Mrs. Harry walks to the phonics rule posted on the wall and reminds students that the c/k rules states to use a c before an a ,o ,u or consonant and a k before an e, i, or

y. She then asks a student how cake is spelled. The student responds, “With a c.” Mrs. Harry has the students make a few more words with their letter cards, all with the long a, silent e pattern.

The group works together to create several more examples of completing the poem. Then Mrs. Harry asks five students to remain at their desks and to use this pattern to write their own poem in their journal. She points out that the students may need to use more words to make the last line make sense. The other students meet Mrs. Harry in the corner of the room where she gives each a phonics reader from the basal series. The story is about Dave and Kate and a race. She has students reading each page silently. Mrs. Harry asks the students if this story reminds them of another one. One student replies, “Yes, The Tortoise and the Hare.” Mrs. Harry touches the hair on her head and says, “This hair?” The students shake their heads and one says, “No, a rabbit.” She asks the students to tell her what lane means. One child describes the lane of a highway. Another discusses a path “like with stepping stones.” She then asks if the students notice anything about the characters names. Immediately a student responds, “They have the same pattern.” Students continue with the story, with discussions following the silent reading of each page.

Mrs. Harry then tells these students to return to their desks to write their own poem. She calls those students sitting at their desks to work with her in the front of the room. She asks each to bring their journal to share. After each reads the original work, Mrs. Harry begins the small group work with them. They read silently from the phonics reader and answer questions after each page. The students at their desks are working on their poetry completion in their journal.

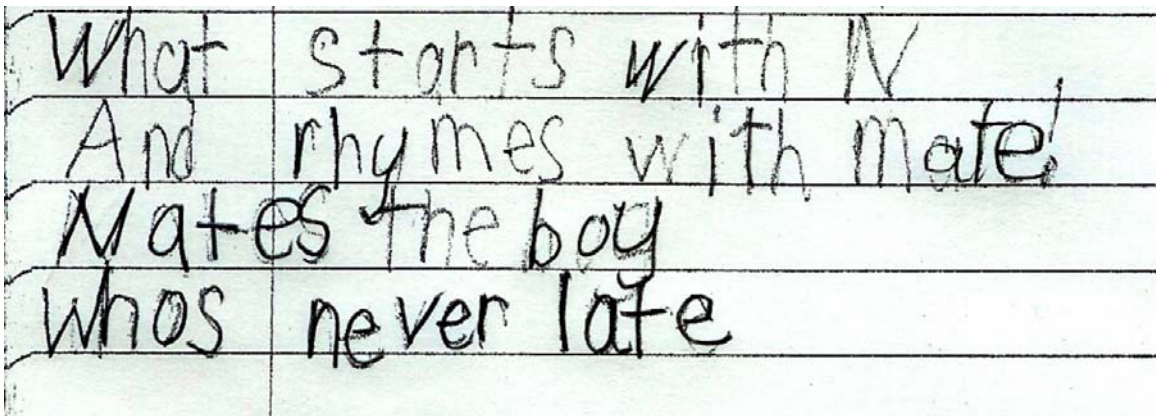


Figure 4.1 Journal Writing - Mrs. Harry's First Grade, February 17, 2004

Mrs. Tom's Room

In her eighth year at the school, Mrs. Tom is highly regarded for her creativity and the problem solving work that she does with her students. Her reputation of being a task master is legendary—yet, students love her and parents respect the work that she does with their children. She spends countless hours planning for instruction.

Mrs. Tom's classroom is 20' x 20'. There are no side rooms, but Mrs. Tom has use of the classroom across the hall for her Destination Imagination work. She uses this classroom as a spill-over when multiple groups of students are rehearsing a skit or performance or to send a child over for quiet reading. She also uses the hall as needed sending groups of kids to spread out to work there.

All of the twelve students are of average to above average ability with three having been identified as academically gifted. Three students struggle with their reading and receive pull-out services from a certified academic language therapist who works with them on decoding skills. I witnessed Mrs. Tom giving these students extra time to complete tasks. Several times, when these students were called on and did not know the

answer immediately, another child would raise his/her hand to answer. Mrs. Tom would reply, "Let's give him/her a chance to think."

Because Mrs. Tom teaches only reading, she has released the bulk of the computers in her classroom to the language arts teacher down the hall. She has two computers in the classroom, one with intra/internet connection and Accelerated Reader (Renaissance Learning, 2004). Students are required to take Accelerated Readers (Renaissance Learning, 2004) tests each nine weeks although the student's score is not a part of the student's grade in reading. Mrs. Tom takes her entire class down to the computer lab for projects. At the start of the study, Mrs. Tom had the student's desks paired off side by side in groups of two. There were three rows with four students on each row with a center aisle between the pairs of desks. This arrangement changed frequently during the study with the desks sometimes shaped in groups of four or making a "u" shape. Students never sat next to the same person for any length of time. Bean bag chairs lined the back wall beneath a bank of five windows across the south wall. Students often did their reading while relaxing there. On the west wall, above the chalkboard, a teacher-made vine is growing. Each leaf has a Greek or Latin prefix, suffix, or root word. Several times during this study, Mrs. Tom did a "quick check" pointing to the words (with a stuffed glove, index finger extended, on the end of a stick) as students responded as a group. Leaves were added to the vine throughout the study. A bulletin board is used to display student work. This board changed several times during the course of this study. Beneath this board are bookshelves made by Mrs. Tom's son to house her extensive collection of books. Mrs. Tom has a library of *Great Illustrated Classics* (Waldman Publishing Co., 1989) which she allows students to check out. There is a checkout system

above the books where students write their names on respective cards for the books that are checked out. There are also bookcases filled with books on the east wall. The room also has a television, microwave oven (which the teacher uses as a timer), and an overhead projector. The teacher's desk is off to the side. Similar to Mrs. Harry, Mrs. Tom continuously circulated around the classroom.

Mrs. Tom has high expectations for her students. Though some parents at first balk at her course requirements, by mid-year there are no complaints. In an interview, Mrs. Tom stated about her students, "I think that they can all learn and I try to convey that to them and also to their parents." Mrs. Tom allows ample time for her students to read in class, but there is also an ongoing assignment required. During this study I observed students reading from the basal, from handouts, from workbooks, from trade books (novels), from newspapers, from their own and from each other's work, from the overhead, from reference books, and from the internet using sites supplied by Mrs. Tom. Students were observed doing original writings both individually and as part of a team. Often students illustrated their work and diagrams and illustrations were typically given to students to emphasize a point. Students created charts, webs, and other visual aids to assist with learning. Besides reading and responding to questions from Mrs. Tom, students wrote summaries of what they had read, wrote original sentences incorporating new vocabulary words, and often participated in role playing using scripts that they authored. Other activities designed to stimulate interest and integrate curriculum include soap carvings (art), estimation (math) using props related to novel, developing a food plan (science/health), writing backwards to imitate Da Vinci, and scavenger hunts with the newspaper.

Mrs. Tom exercises efficient use of time in her reading class, yet states that she often feels that the class period is just not long enough. Twice during my observations she sent a student to ask the teacher who was to teach this group immediately after to allow her a few more minutes with the class. Her routines were well established. Students knew that they were to copy assignments as soon as they came into the classroom. Mrs. Tom gave explicit instruction about what materials were to be out on the desk. Because students rotate between three teachers in the grade, students would sometimes come into class without the necessary supplies. Mrs. Tom never let a student interrupt another class for supplies, but students were allowed to go to their backpacks in the hall to retrieve supplies. This was not without consequences, however. Mrs. Tom has a ticket system in place. Students are given tickets at the start of the year and may earn additional tickets for work or deeds well done. However, students lose tickets for lack of homework and supplies or as a consequence for violating discipline rules. Once a month, Mrs. Tom opens her “store” where students can make purchases with the tickets that they have. This system is accepted by the students and is run very matter-of-factly by Mrs. Tom. For example, a student said, “Mrs. Tom, may I have another study guide?” Her reply was, “Certainly. Leave a ticket on my desk.” Students are well aware that there are consequences for all of their actions.

The feeling in Mrs. Tom’s room is one of warmth and safety, yet structure is ubiquitous. Students feel free to read aloud, to answer questions, and to express their opinions. Mrs. Tom remarked, “The *S* word in my class is *stupid*. We don’t say the *S* word.” She also remarked, “I think that they (the students) are nice to each other.” Although Mrs. Tom loves her students, it is clear that her goal is not to be a peer, but the

adult in the room. Mrs. Tom said that students “need to know that you care about them, but that you are the teacher and that you do have that authority. I feel lucky because I think I have that.”

Mrs. Tom’s goals for her fifth grade reading class are to introduce the students to a variety of reading materials and techniques that will entice them to read. She relies strongly on vocabulary development and believes that modeling is necessary. She provides a large amount of class time for reading and also requires independent reading for homework. She submits daily lesson plans on Friday of each week.

Vignette: January 29, 2004

As students walk in, their first task is to copy homework in their assignment book. Mrs. Tom then asks each to retrieve their copy of The Cay (Taylor, 1969) from the bin and to sit on a “raft” (large sheets of paper) for the lesson. She tells the students, “Now take exactly 60 seconds and get your partner and get on a life raft.” As students locate the correct page, Mrs. Tom reviews the story by having the students respond to questions such as, “Where is the story taking place? What is going on in the world at this time? What did Philip and his family just see?” One student asks, “Wouldn’t it have been safer for Philip and his mom to fly back to the states?” A short discussion follows as to why the family chose to go by boat instead. Students are asked one at a time to take a turn reading orally. Mrs. Tom says “Popcorn” when she is ready for a different student to read. At that time, the student reading calls on a friend to start reading from that point.

The dialect is difficult for the children and Mrs. Tom has taken steps to assist them in understanding. A student asks, “What is motah?” Mrs. Tom has the student re-read the sentence and the student decides that the word intended is motor. Mrs. Tom asks

the students to complete a guide that she has given as they come across vocabulary in dialect. The guide lists words featured in the text and students are to “translate” these words into their intended meaning.

Timothy spoke in a unique dialect that is sometimes difficult for the reader to understand. Below are several words Timothy uses in The Cay. See if you can decipher their meaning and try to pronounce them using an melodic accent to imitate Timothy’s voice.

As you read the book, continue to add the words Timothy uses to your list and write their meanings. Turn the list in when you finish reading The Cay.

Wattah:	_____
Dis:	_____
Dat:	_____
Mahn:	_____
D’mahn:	_____
Bahss:	_____
Ovah:	_____
Motah:	_____
D’nex:	_____
Islan’:	_____
Feesh:	_____

Figure 4.2 Teacher Made Worksheet – Mrs. Tom’s Fifth Grade

As the reading progresses, Mrs. Tom interrupts with questions pertaining to vocabulary or comprehension. For example, she asks, “What does parched mean?” She interjects the correct word when a student misreads defiantly and definitely. She also takes the opportunity to foreshadow prejudice, one of the themes of the novel. A student has just read a passage that Mrs. Tom re-reads, “My father had always taught me to address anyone that I took to be an adult as “mister,” but Timothy didn’t seem to be a

mister. Besides, he was black” (Taylor, 1969, p. 34). Mrs. Tom opens a discussion on the relationship between Philip, the young boy, and Timothy, the native who rescues him.

At one point, Mrs. Tom has the entire class reading orally together. When she senses that the class is becoming restless, she asks them to stand up and wiggle. She does a countdown. By the time she reaches “one” all students are back in place ready to read again. As the story progresses, the students read about sharks in the water. She reminds the students that their extremities could not be hanging over the edge of the raft as they would be in danger of a shark attack. She places sharks on the floor and makes the picture of the shark touch any body parts not totally within the boundaries of the rafts as the students continue with their reading. The students continue with guided oral reading until the chapter is completed.

Students are then asked to do brainstorming. They are to write a list of how they think Philip felt at that moment. She allows 70 seconds for writing and begins counting down when the time is nearly up. She calls on each pair to read their responses and thanks the groups after they speak. Mrs. Tom discusses the flying fish from the novel and asks students to imagine eating one. Their next task is to compile a list with their partner of how the fish feels, tastes, smells and its temperature. As students give their answers to the class, not all agree on the fish’s temperature. One student thinks it will be warm “because it just got out of the water.” Another thinks that the fish will be cold because “it’s a cold-blooded animal.” It is time for the class to end, and Mrs. Tom ends with a challenge. “Find out if fish are cold-blooded or warm-blooded for a bonus point tomorrow.” Students are excited for the opportunity. Mrs. Tom asks how they will get this answer. One student replies, “I’ll look in the encyclopedia.” Another says, “I’ll ask

Jeeves.” This is a computer search engine used often by the students in Mrs. Tom’s class for other subjects.

CHAPTER V

MINI TOUR OBSERVATIONS

The research questions presented in Chapter One guided the mini tour observations. These questions are:

1. What are the strategies used by effective teachers in helping their students to read? Why are these particular strategies used?
2. What are the teachers' beliefs concerning literacy and how do these beliefs shape instruction? What are teacher characteristics/personal qualities that shape instruction?
3. What materials in addition to the basal are used by effective teachers in the teaching of reading?
4. What is the climate of classrooms with effective reading programs? What type of classroom management does the teacher employ? What is the teacher's role in the classroom? What is the relationship between teacher and students and between students?

Through focused observations and interviews, I was able to glean the answers to these questions. I was surprised at how similar these teachers were. However, for readability purposes, I have answered each question as a separate case study as I discuss what was discovered in each classroom.

Effective Strategies

Question 1: What are the strategies used by effective teachers in helping their students to read? Why are these particular strategies used?

Analysis of the data revealed strategies in several categories: (1) Phonemic Awareness/Phonics/Decoding/Spelling, (2) Vocabulary Development, (3) Comprehension/ Understanding Text/Metacognition, (4) Fluency, (5) Writing, and (6) Assessment.

Phonemic Awareness/Phonics/Decoding/Spelling

The National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) grouped Phonemic Awareness (PA) and phonics in the same category under the heading Alphabetics. I have included decoding and spelling in this domain due to the fact that half of this study dealt with a fifth grade class where I did not witness extensive PA and phonics instruction. These fifth graders were capable readers; however, when approaching unfamiliar words they were given explicit instruction in decoding.

Mrs. Harry

Dodd Elementary implements the Saxon Phonics (Simmons & Calvert, 1996) program in kindergarten, first, and second grade. All but one student in the Mrs. Harry's first grade attended kindergarten at this school last year. The returning students moved into first grade having had a solid training in PA and Phonics. The student new to the school this year is extremely bright and has had no difficulty mastering the scaffolded synthetic phonics lessons. Mrs. Harry reports that this student has needed minimal assistance above what is provided for the other students in the class. All of the students could identify letters and their sounds.

Mrs. Harry often made reference to a Saxon Phonics (Simmons & Calvert, 1996) skill or lesson while teaching reading. Therefore, I made a point of observing three of

those lessons. These lessons were highly structured with Mrs. Harry modifying the script that accompanied the program. She told me that there was simply not enough time to cover the entire lesson as presented. She made adjustments based on what she knew her students needed to know. For example, she didn't always do the review of sounds and spellings because she found that this did not keep her students' interest. One modification that she added was to have her students highlight the element of focus for each lesson. If the lesson demonstrated the *long e* sound formed by *ee* and *ea* then students used a highlighter and marked words where those two letters made the *long e* sound.

I noted the way that Mrs. Harry emphasized operational definitions. For example, she repeatedly had students tell her what the term *medial* meant (*in the middle*). She had students tell her what *usually* meant (*almost always*). She often pointed to a phonics rule posted on the wall. She reminded students of past lessons when words came up that gave students difficulty. For example, "Remember that diphthong we talked about with the word *cloud*?" Mrs. Harry would check student homework each day and review or reteach as needed—either with the whole class, a small group, or individually.

The basal program had accompanying Phonics Practice Readers (Farr, Strickland & Beck, 2001) that focused on specific skills with each story. Additionally, Mrs. Harry always brought in supplemental trade books that featured the pattern she emphasized for that lesson. Mrs. Harry told me that she made a concerted effort to keep phonics from being "too sterile." Mrs. Harry integrated phonics in working with spelling. During reading instruction with the basal or using a trade book, Mrs. Harry gave explicit instruction on looking at parts of words. She had students isolate and identify phonemes and blend and delete phonemes.

Mrs. Harry's instruction included the alphabetic principle. Each student had his own set of letter cards. Often Mrs. Harry had the students arrange them in alphabetical order on their desks before using the letters to form a specified word. As she modeled on the overhead, Mrs. Harry would have students form vocabulary words. Giving only verbal instructions, she would have students form new words by changing phonemes. For example, Mrs. Harry may have the word *smile* spelled out. Then she would say, "Now take away a letter or letters to make your word say *mile*." Once she had monitored to ascertain student's accuracy, she would say, "Now add a letter or letters to make it say *while*."

Students were expected to focus on letter/sound correspondences. For example, she asked, "Is there an *s* in *dance*? Is there a *z* in *please*?" Mrs. Harry drew on the students' love for rhyming words to work with sounds. Using patterned or predictable books, she was able to reinforce the concept of letter-sound correspondences. Mrs. Harry had students identify the number of syllables in a word (usually by putting their hand under their chin while pronouncing it). She reminded students of previously introduced rules. Word recognition strategies were emphasized. Mrs. Harry pointed out the letter configuration of words. When the word *moved* appeared, she discussed with students the fact that only *d* was added instead of the usual *ed* to form past tense. Students joined in the discussion by adding other words that would follow this same rule.

Spelling tests were given in Mrs. Harry's classroom. The policy regarding correct spelling in writing was as follows: If the word had already been learned, Mrs. Harry expected the students to spell it correctly. Before a writing assignment, she often asked, "What will you do if you don't know how to spell a word?" The students would respond,

“First look in our head.” The next step was to look in their copy of Words I Use When I Write (Trisler & Cardiel, 1989). If neither option was successful, then students were told to “spell it the best you can” until help was available. Mrs. Harry would leave a new word misspelled if students had not been introduced to it yet. For example, one student spelled *naughty* as *note*. For those words that should be spelled correctly, Mrs. Harry often put the correct spelling on a post-it note or in pencil on their writings.

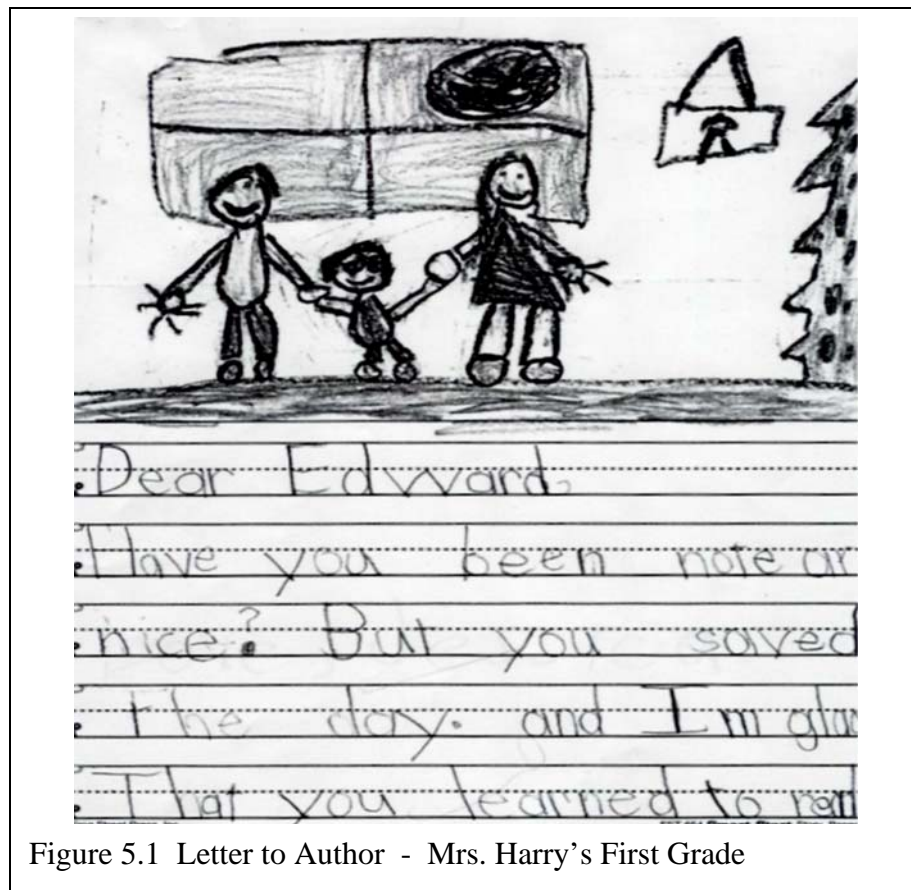


Figure 5.1 Letter to Author - Mrs. Harry's First Grade

Mrs. Harry reminded students to practice sight words at home with their parents using the flash cards that were sent home. She told them they would be better readers if they knew those words “right off the bat” and did not have to take the time to analyze them. Letters sent home kept parents informed of the sight words introduced.

Mrs. Tom

Phonics instruction was not taught as an isolated skill in the fifth grade, but was integrated into vocabulary instruction and spelling. Undoubtedly, the students needed to draw on their previous knowledge of PA and phonics to decode. Mrs. Tom remarked in an interview, “I am lucky that this school gives the students the solid foundation that it does in phonics. These students come to me knowing a lot of skills. There is a lot to build on.” She encouraged students to use context clues and their background knowledge to identify unknown words. Using root words, suffixes, or prefixes, Mrs. Tom had students draw analogies between unfamiliar words and words that they knew. She stated, “Students are individually instructed ...[in phonics] as deficiencies are noted.”

I did not observe any spelling lessons, per se, yet I am aware that these students had formal spelling instruction and took a weekly spelling test. I did have multiple opportunities to watch Mrs. Tom address spelling in her students’ writings. She discussed syllabication with her students. Mrs. Tom reminded students to pronounce parts of words. During one lesson, Mrs. Tom made all of her students stand, raise their right hand, and repeat after her, “I will never again spell *a lot* and *all right* as one word.”

Mrs. Tom gave explicit instruction on looking at parts of words when students encountered an unfamiliar word. Her extensive use of root words, suffixes, and prefixes had her students always searching for patterns that they recognized. For example, the word *dejected* led one student to comment, “*Ject* means to throw. I guess I could throw out a sad face.” Mrs. Tom stated, “I think root words, prefixes, and suffixes help them [the student] understand when they encounter new words.”

Mrs. Tom was a master of opportunistic teaching. This was particularly evident in the area of decoding. Mrs. Tom would bring in words that students were familiar with and use them in context to help with unfamiliar words. For example, *convalesce* was the word studied. Mrs. Tom asked, “Do any of you have any older relatives in a *convalescent* home?”

<p>Name: _____</p> <p>Greek and Latin Root Word Test</p> <p>Bi and Du: _____</p> <p>Mono and Uni: _____</p> <p>Bene and Bon: _____</p> <p>Flam and Pyro: _____</p> <p>Jet and Ject: _____</p> <p>Pod and Ped: _____</p> <p>Cent: _____</p> <p>Geo and Terr: _____</p> <p>Dec: _____</p> <p>Arch: _____</p> <p>Aqua and Hydra: _____</p> <p>Quad: _____</p> <p>Pent and Quint: _____</p> <p>Phil: _____</p> <p>Cap: _____</p> <p>Temp and Chron: _____</p> <p>Sym: _____</p> <p>Phobia: _____</p> <p>Mater: _____</p> <p>Fract: _____</p> <p>Min: _____</p> <p>Mal: _____</p> <p>Tri: _____</p> <p>Pater: _____</p> <p>Foli: _____</p> <p>Mob: _____</p> <p>Gram and Graph: _____</p> <p>Orb: _____</p> <p>Mot: _____</p> <p>Roto: _____</p> <p>Cor: _____</p> <p>Dict: _____</p> <p>Manu: _____</p> <p>Cardio: _____</p> <p>Scrib: _____</p> <p>Corp: _____</p> <p>Syn: _____</p> <p>Astr and Stell: _____</p> <p>Gen: _____</p> <p>Spic and Spec: _____</p> <p>Port: _____</p> <p>Volv: _____</p> <p>Carn: _____</p> <p>Miss: _____</p> <p>Cycle: _____</p> <p>Carn: _____</p> <p>Mitt: _____</p>	<p>Greek and Latin Root Words</p> <p>Quiz Date: <u>February 3rd</u></p> <p>Mono, Uni: one</p> <p>Bi, Du: two</p> <p>Tri: three</p> <p>Quad: four</p> <p>Quint, Pent: five</p> <p>Dec: Ten</p> <p>Cent: 100</p> <p>Ped: foot</p> <p>Pod: foot</p> <p>Aqua, Hydra: water</p> <p>Gen: birth or origin</p> <p>Min: small</p> <p>Bene, Bon: good</p> <p>Mal: bad</p> <p>Geo, Terr: earth</p> <p>Pyro, Flam: fire</p> <p>Fract: break</p> <p>Phobia: fear</p> <p>Phil: love</p> <p>Cap: head</p> <p>Arch: ruler or chief</p> <p>Mob: move</p> <p>Mot: move</p> <p>Gram, Graph: write</p> <p>Mater: mother</p> <p>Pater: father</p> <p>Dict: speak</p> <p>Cor: heart</p> <p>Foli: leaf</p> <p>Ject, Jet: throw</p> <p>Syn: together or same</p> <p>Syn: together or same</p> <p>Astr, Stell: star</p> <p>Chron: time</p> <p>Temp: time</p> <p>Scrib: write</p> <p>Manu: hand</p> <p>Spic: look</p> <p>Spec: look</p> <p>Port: carry</p> <p>Cardio: heart</p> <p>Roto: turn</p> <p>Volv: turn</p> <p>Miss: send</p> <p>Cycle: round or roundness</p> <p>Corp: flesh or body</p> <p>Orb: round or roundness</p> <p>Mitt: send</p> <p>Carn: flesh or body</p>
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Figure 5.2 Study Guide/Quiz for Mrs. Tom’s Fifth Grade – Root Words, Suffixes, Prefixes

Vocabulary Development

Studies have shown a “very clear and positive association between the extent of a reader’s vocabulary and her or his comprehension skills” (Pressley, 2002, p. 267). Mrs. Harry and Mrs. Tom worked daily to develop their students’ written and oral vocabulary. Both teachers introduced new words before their students encountered them in text. And both teachers worked with vocabulary in an ongoing fashion – directly and indirectly.

Mrs. Harry

Field notes show Mrs. Harry using sophisticated dialogue as she spoke with her first graders, yet defining unfamiliar words or asking students to give meanings based on context clues. For example, when the school was collecting canned goods for the local food bank, she asked students, “Who will benefit from all the cans of food that we collect? What do I mean by *benefit*?” Whenever a word came up that Mrs. Harry felt students may not know, either in a story or as part of conversation, she was careful to define it. “What do you think he meant when he said he was *grateful*?” “I’m *reluctant* to let you go. I’m not sure that it’s the thing to do.” As new words were introduced, Mrs. Harry used those words as part of natural conversation. She called the new vocabulary words the student’s *new friends*. During an interview, Mrs. Harry said, “It’s all about the words. I try to help the students get inside of them.” Often students decorated the bulletin board of front door with illustrations of new words or pictures depicting a specified letter or blend.



Figure 5.3 Mrs. Harry's First Grade – Illustrating “V” Words

Mrs. Harry had the students work with vocabulary words in a variety of ways. Students made flash cards and played games with the vocabulary words. Some of Mrs. Harry's classroom discussion about new words pointed out the peculiarities of the English language. For example, she touched on homonyms, homographs, and homophones. Although not referred to by these labels to her first graders, Mrs. Harry would say, “Now which *week* is this? Monday is the first day of the *week*?” Students would respond: “W-e-e-k.” Discussing the homograph *live*, she said, “I won't know how to say it until I read it in the story.” Mrs. Harry emphasized multiple meanings and multiple uses of words. Students used *right* and *strike* in as many different ways as they could. Mrs. Harry actively involved the students in the learning of new words. She had the students illustrate new words or act them out.

Mrs. Harry felt that misconceptions concerning new vocabulary could be cleared by having students use these words in oral and written sentences. This was demonstrated when a student made the following sentence orally with the word *by*: “I will *buy*

Gabrielle some candy.” Another student used *win* as follows: “*When* I get home, I will play.” Mrs. Harry had her students use new words in their writing, emphasizing that the sentences that they wrote would need to make sense. Students laughed when she read off the list of words as if it were a sentence. “Can I write, *Hear, full, please, write, try, moved* and call it a sentence?”

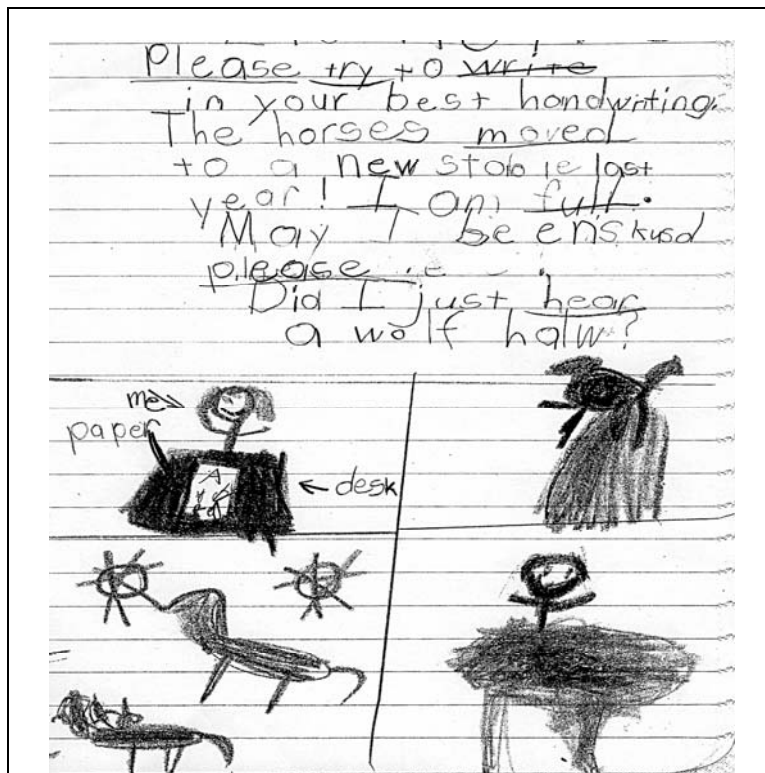


Figure 5.4 Vocabulary Words used in Journal Writing – Mrs. Harry’s First Grade

Mrs. Harry used a variety of strategies to assist students in recognizing new words. She told her students to pay careful attention because “there was only one letter that was different in the words *there* and *these*.” When discussing the *long e* sound made by *ea* and *ee*, Mrs. Harry told her students that “sometimes you just have to see what looks right.” She gave mnemonic devices to students: “Hear has *ear* and you need your ear to hear.” She provided multiple exposures to new words for her students.

Mrs. Harry enjoyed a play on words. On Valentine's Day, she pointed out examples, such as "*Police be mine.*" She made certain that her students were aware of idioms and the author's intention. "What did he mean when he told them to *bundle up*?" She and her students shared a laugh when the character in one story told her dance class to *warm up* and the main character put on his coat. Mrs. Harry then had the students in her class who are enrolled in after school dance classes show how they warm up for class.

Mrs. Tom

Mrs. Tom introduced new vocabulary words for the basal stories and novels that the students used. She supplemented her program with an additional vocabulary book, Wordly Wise (Hodkinson & Adams, 1998). In addition, she developed exercises to introduce Greek and Latin root words, suffixes, and prefixes using the series, Words on the Vine (Vurnakes, 1998) as the basis for these activities. With this program, Mrs. Tom introduced six to eight words, suffixes or prefixes per week. She added a leaf to an ever-growing vine on her wall for each newly introduced item. She said, "I introduce long words that kids are really interested in—and associated activities with different levels of thinking skills from Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy. . . We do nearly 100 Greek and Latin root words a year. In addition, students learn vocabulary for each story and/or novel they read through the year." Mrs. Tom stated, "Students learn a large number of roots, prefixes, and suffixes, which I believe provide important tools to better understand vocabulary and improve reading comprehension."

Mrs. Tom assisted students in identifying the part of speech for all new words. Students were given typed lists of new words and participated in lectures and discussions covering definitions and multiple meanings. Students illustrated new words and acted

them out. Mrs. Tom said, “The use of body motions seems to help it [the meaning] stick in their heads.” I watched her *saunter* around the room as she had her students mimic her. They showed Mrs. Tom a *solemn* face. I also saw students work in cooperative groups to write and perform a skit where they *intercepted* the ball before being *impaled* on the fence.

Mrs. Tom had students decipher words they encountered in their independent reading by looking within the words for parts that they knew. She had students rely on context clues to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words. Students used new words in their writing. Sometimes this was in the form of a summary of the story that needed to include vocabulary words. Other assignments had students answering comprehension questions using new words in their response. Students completed exercises from the vocabulary workbook and were tested weekly on vocabulary. Mrs. Tom used newly introduced words in conversation. “I do words all year. . . we look for them in our reading and try to use them in writing. We try to use them in conversation.”

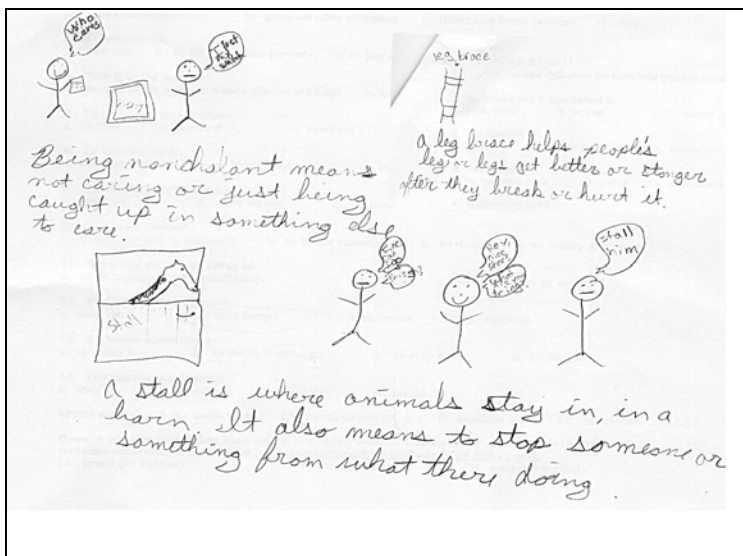


Figure 5.5 Illustrations using Vocabulary Words – Mrs. Tom’s Fifth Grade

Comprehension/Understanding Text/Metacognition

Both teachers went to great lengths to be certain that students derived meaning from the text. They set the stage for reading prior to beginning a new story or novel and provided opportunities for students to interact with the text. Mrs. Harry and Mrs. Tom did not want students to simply recall what was read, but to synthesize, analyze, and evaluate the information. This is what Allington (2001) refers to as *thoughtful literacy*. Both teachers modeled their own thought processes and encouraged students to verbalize what they were thinking as they engaged in literacy activities.

Mrs. Harry

Mrs. Harry spent considerable time helping students to become familiar with the text by setting the stage. When introducing the new text, she stimulated interest in the story's contents by discussing the author and illustrator and having students predict storyline and outcome based on illustrations. Mrs. Harry spent considerable time having students reach conclusions by examining details in the illustrations. She also used the Table of Contents of the basal to help set the stage. Mrs. Harry showed her excitement for the new reading material as she allowed students to peruse before actual reading began. She remarked to her students, "I know good books!"

Mrs. Harry believed that a student's prior knowledge determined understanding of the text. She linked the current text to past learning and to student experiences. She also linked learning in other disciplines. For example, all students tried the illustrator's batik technique in their own drawings after reading the story *Too Much Talk* (Medearis, 2001). Mrs. Harry had world, U.S., and state maps to accompany her lesson of Me on the Map (Sweeney, 1996). Mrs. Harry used multiple modalities for lesson presentation. She

brought in a turnip for students who were willing to taste and vanilla extract for all to smell.

Mrs. Harry instructed her first graders on conventions of print as she introduced the text. She had students focus on ending punctuation. They practiced reading with excitement or reading as if frightened. She demonstrated the author's intent when a page was written in all capital letters by raising her voice. She instructed students on the meaning of an ellipsis –“something is left out.” Mrs. Harry worked with quotation marks and assigned students to be the narrator. Their job was quite difficult. Once a student read his part in quotation, the narrator would complete the sentence. For example, one student may say, “I’m hungry.” The narrator would say, “Said the dog.” She also explained the notion of wrap around text as the stories grew longer and pointed out that the second line did not begin with a capital letter because it was the middle of a sentence.

Mrs. Harry helped her students to break down the text to better understand it. Using many of the same strategies that were employed when perusing the text for an introduction, this strategy differed by focusing in on specific questions about the text. Mrs. Harry had students look carefully at the details in the illustrations. She asked, “Why do you think she is shaking?” The students replied, “She’s laughing.” Repeated readings in first grade always brought added information forward. Following a second reading of The Biggest, Best Snowman (Cuyler, 1998) a first grader said, “I just noticed that the illustrator wrote one letter in the snow on each page.” Students were asked to role play and to examine characters’ traits and feelings. Mrs. Harry stated that her goal was to get her students “inside the story.” Students dictated story elements that Mrs. Harry listed on the overhead. Mrs. Harry used visual organizers to break down the text. She used a Venn

Diagram on three occasions. She also used a chart labeled *Beginning, Middle, and End* where students illustrated and wrote sentences about the story. On another occasion, the students broke down a story by writing sentence strips. Mrs. Harry had her students give oral and written summaries.

Asking higher order questions was a strategy employed by Mrs. Harry. Often her questions began with *why* instead of *what*. Students associated one story with another and recalled how their own experiences related to what was read. The students were often asked to imagine or “picture in your head.” Mrs. Harry had the students extend their responses and the responses of their classmates. Mrs. Harry modeled her own thought processes as she worked. She often wondered aloud and was careful to explain how she arrived at conclusions. She discussed how she made connections to previous learning to reach predictions. She had her students continue to predict as the reading progressed. She expected her students to reflect on their thinking strategies. Just as the student explained why he thought the animal in the tree was a bat instead of a bird (because bats sleep during the day and “the bird would have gotten bored and. . . would fly away”), students were often explaining how they reached certain conclusions or predictions. Mrs. Harry reminded students to “look in your head” when an answer didn’t come quickly. She helped her students make connections with what they read and found ways to have them interact with the text. They drew a map of their bedroom just as the girl had in Me on the Map (Sweeny, 1996). Students explained why the dance teacher was named Mrs. Tiptoe. They knew how Digger Pig must have felt when no one would help him with his work because that story reminded them of The Little Red Hen (Galdone, 1973).

Mrs. Tom

Mrs. Tom spent time introducing a story or novel before students began reading. She used a modified version of SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Respond, Review) by having her students skim the text to assist with their predictions and the answering of questions. She linked the current text to past learning and learning in other areas. For example, while reading From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler (Konigsburg, 1967), students estimated the numbers of pairs of socks that could fit in a violin case and compared Da Vinci's contributions during the Renaissance Period to current day inventions that were an outgrowth of his genius. While reading The Cay (Taylor, 1969), Mrs. Tom used her map to show where Curacao was located and to describe the importance of the setting during World War II.

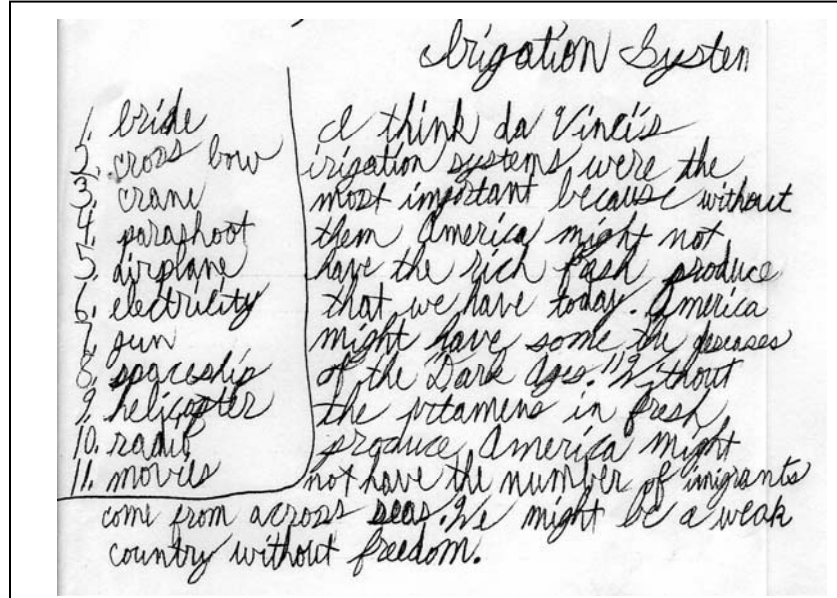


Figure 5.6 Critical Thinking Writing – Analyze and Evaluate Mrs. Tom's Fifth Grade

Mrs. Tom used exercises that helped students understand the characters. Students tried to write as Da Vinci did. They were asked to role play and to examine character traits

and character's feelings. For example, she had students walk with a blindfold so that they could imagine what Phillip of The Cay (Taylor, 1969), must have felt like when he lost his vision. She had students sit on a "life raft" for an extended period of time to realize how confined the characters must have felt. Mrs. Tom had the students evaluate the pros and cons of running away while reading From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler (Königsburg, 1967). One exercise that accompanied The Cay (Taylor, 1969), had Mrs. Tom's students write an account of a day using the main character's perspective. They were to include what Philip must have felt like to be stranded on a deserted island with a stranger and without his vision. Mrs. Tom had students analyze the conflicts that the characters faced after identifying three areas of conflict – person vs. person, person vs. self, and person vs. nature.

Mrs. Tom used visual organizers to help her students break down the text. Mrs. Tom had her students draw four columns on a sheet of paper as they began their novel reading. The labels for each were: *Setting*, *Characters*, *Plot*, and *Vocabulary*. Before beginning silent reading, Mrs. Tom would remind her students to take their charts with them to the bean bag chairs so that they could add to them as they progressed in the story. Mrs. Tom also had the students complete a plot diagram for one of their novels which listed initiating action, rising action, climax, and resolution.

Gulliver's Travels - Jonathan Swift					
Who?	Did what?	When?	Where?	Why?	How?
Dr. Lemuel Gulliver	He landed on a tiny people island. He got pinned down & shot at w/ arrows. They let him live in their city. He escaped & went back to his country. He landed on a huge people island. He performed tricks to get his master money. He was sold to the queen. He was treated poorly. He got rescued and went back to his country.	Through 1699-1709	On Lilliput and Brobdingnag.	He landed on Lilliput because he was shipwrecked. He was left on Brobdingnag because his crew saw a giant and they left w/o him.	There was a huge storm and it crashed their boat in half. He and some other people got on the life boat & it tipped and the water brought him to Lilliput. Gulliver and the people on his boat stopped on Brobdingnag after a storm. His crew left him there because they saw a giant.

Figure 5.7 Visual Organizer – Mrs. Tom's Fifth Grade

Mrs. Tom gave strategies for helping students recall and reflect on the text. She encouraged one student who had difficulty with short term memory to write a short sentence about each page after reading it. She encouraged all students to read questions that needed to be answered prior to beginning the actual reading. Mrs. Tom taught students how to skim the text to find facts. For example, she assisted one student who was searching for the answer to a question about the Egyptian sarcophagus in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She said, "Let your eye glance down the page until you see the word *Egyptian*. It will be capitalized because it's proper." I observed Mrs. Tom showing students how to skim information when they worked in the computer lab doing research. Students often summarized, orally and in writing, what was read.

Asking higher order questions accompanied reading each day. Mrs. Tom wanted the students to predict, analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and elaborate. Students were often expected to work in groups where there consensus building occurred. Students were exposed to Mrs. Tom's thought processes. She made her thinking public by explaining how and why she arrived at a certain conclusions. Mrs. Tom had students explain their strategies for determining solutions as well. This modeling of metacognitive processes was a common occurrence in Mrs. Tom classroom. It facilitated decision making for the students about their reading and writing. Students wrote brief summaries in their reading logs after reading independently at home. The students were told that these entries were not to be lengthy. Therefore, the students omitted unnecessary information. Mrs. Tom's technique of having students write in response to reading, especially with summaries of what was read, helped the students monitor their own comprehension.

Fluency

Having the ability to decode automatically and without difficulty is a characteristic of a good reader. Being a fluent reader aids comprehension (Adams, 1990, Cunningham & Allington, 1994, Hall & Moats, 1999). Mrs. Harry and Mrs. Tom worked on developing fluency in their classrooms.

Mrs. Harry

Mrs. Harry recognized the need to have students read fluently. In an interview, she stated, “The text won’t come alive if we’re reading it word by word.” When reading orally she allowed students the time to self-correct their errors. Yet she had the student reread the passage following a mistake. The students were given many opportunities to practice reading. Mrs. Harry used guided oral reading and independent silent reading to focus on fluency. Guided oral reading took many forms. She had students take turns reading orally. She used choral reading. She had her first graders clap out the rhythm of a book as they read orally. Mrs. Harry praised students after oral reading, giving specific feedback. For example, she said, “Did you hear how Anna read that exclamation mark?”

The technique that Allington (2001) referred to as Shared Book Experience was done by Mrs. Harry with their students. Prior to reading a new trade book, Mrs. Harry discussed the title, author, cover, and illustrations. Students were asked to predict the storyline and outcome. Mrs. Harry read the story aloud interjecting dramatic phrasing and intonations. Following class discussion of the book, there were repeated readings. Mrs. Harry often had one student read the entire story while the remainder of the class followed along. Several times Mrs. Harry had her students listen to the basal story on an audio tape prior to reading orally. She often had her students perform the story where

students assumed a character's role. Once she had students make face puppets out of paper plates and sticks to represent the character that they represented.

Mrs. Harry allotted blocks of time for independent reading. Her reading center had more than 900 books of varying genres and levels. Students were expected to read at home as well. Mrs. Harry stated, "Children have to have time to read every day at home and at school. We have Monday Night Reading when the children take home a book in a Ziploc to read to parents. These are usually Take-Home Books (Farr, Strickland, Beck, 2001) or Instant Readers (Farr, Strickland, Beck, 2001). I encourage Accelerated Reader – AR- (Renaissance Learning, 2004) participation by providing tubs of AR (Renaissance Learning, 2004) books at first grade level. The books I read daily are prominently displayed for the children to reread or peruse. There is a big basket of books that they may read, alone or in pairs. When the children finish with a basal reader, they take it home over a weekend to read to their parents. The children receive a monthly skills calendar that encourages local library use and recommends authors and series of books as possible choices. I try to find companion books to go with every project and activity from Dr. Suess' 100th birthday to our field trips to SciPort. The amount of independent reading time varies from day to day and depends on many factors. But children read connected, interesting print every day in the form of books, poems, and/or magazines."

Mrs. Tom

Mrs. Tom felt it was important to have students read fluently. During one observation, Mrs. Tom told her students, "Let's read this passage without interruption." She had students repeat a passage of oral reading after the student self-corrected errors. Field notes show Mrs. Tom stating, "Sweetie, let's read that again."

Guided oral reading took many forms in Mrs. Tom's classroom. She used paired reading or buddy reading, where stronger readers were paired with those not as strong. She used choral reading on a few occasions. The students were given many opportunities to practice reading. Mrs. Tom used a technique that she called "popcorning" for guided reading practice in her classroom. She would call on one student to begin reading orally. After that child had read for a while, Mrs. Tom would say "popcorn." That meant that student would call out the name of a classmate who was to continue reading orally from that point. Mrs. Tom stated, "I keep a little check list in my hand or in my book and check off each student's name as he reads each time to be sure that everyone is reading and attentive. I have found that this simple tool helps me keep track of my readers in a quick, no-hassle way." Students in Mrs. Tom's class will read and study six novels during the course of the year in addition to 15 – 20 *Great Illustrated Classics* (Waldman Publishing Corporation, 1989) read during and outside of class.

Prior to introducing a new novel book, Mrs. Tom spent a considerable amount of time introducing the text. She was concerned that students would have difficulty with the dialect presented in The Cay (Taylor, 1969). She read orally, pronouncing the unfamiliar words and had students "translate" these for her. She provided a chart for students to keep track of the meaning of the words written in dialect. Mrs. Tom had her students practice reading passages that included this strong dialect. In introducing the novels to her students, Mrs. Tom would begin reading orally for the students' 'listening pleasure,' as she called it. For both The Cay (Taylor, 1969) and From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler (Konigsburg, 1967), Mrs. Tom read enough to "hook" the students.

Mrs. Tom allotted large blocks of time for independent reading. She allowed her students to go to a bean bag chair (there was one for each student) in the back of the classroom and read for extended periods of time. She stated, “I try to give students extended individual in-class reading time of at least 20 minutes daily in addition to their large group, small group, and other reading activities.” She required two hours of independent reading a week for homework. The note sent home to parents outlining expectations for the third quarter listed the requirement of five *Great Illustrated Classics* (Waldman Publishing Co., 1989) with a culminating activity for each book. Mrs. Tom’s classroom library had over 1500 books. Students could borrow from the classroom library, the school library, or read from books of their choice. Mrs. Tom used the Accelerated Reader (Renaissance Learning, 2004) program as a tool to monitor comprehension.

Writing

Both teachers had students write often. Mrs. Tom stated that the best reading assessment techniques involved having students write their responses to reading. “When students write in response to literature or vocabulary development, I can tell immediately their understanding and their areas of strength and weaknesses.” Mrs. Harry referred to writing as “the flip side of reading.” Mrs. Harry and Mrs. Tom used writing as a way to gauge their students’ understanding of text.

Mrs. Harry

First graders began the day by writing when they “signed in” each day. They wrote daily in their journals. Often the assignment was to write sentences that told what happened in a story. Sometimes the writing was on the topic of their choice. At other

times the topic was prescribed or students were asked to make sentences using certain vocabulary words. First graders wrote poems, contributed to class books, and wrote letters. Some of the writings were individual efforts and others were group writings. When first graders wrote as a group, they were asked to sign the writing to indicate that they were a participant.

Mrs. Harry used writing as a way to teach students about the conventions of print. She discussed wrap around text as the stories became longer. Mrs. Harry said, "That's such a hard concept because they want to capitalize every first line—the first word of every line. Then they don't want to put any capitals in the text except on the first line." To assist the students in the development of their writing, she modeled on the overhead. Often she wrote as students dictated, questioning as she wrote. "What do I need here?" she might ask. Or, "Where do I need quotation marks?" Mrs. Harry also emphasized the creative aspect of writing. She told her students, "When you write an imaginative sentence, people can see it." Mrs. Harry had students share their writings with their peers. The students praised each other's efforts and commented on points of interest.

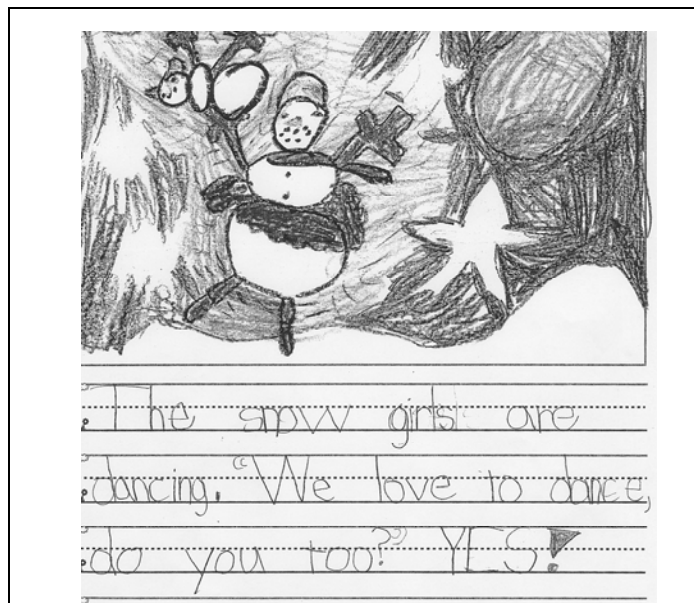


Figure 5.8 Conventions of Print – Mrs. Harry's First Grade

Mrs. Harry marveled at her students' progress in writing. She discussed how tedious the writing process was for her students during the start of the year then stated, "And the next thing you know, they are writing long sentences." Mrs. Harry felt that students who wrote became better readers. The calendar that she sent home for January listed a topic for students to write about each night. "It's a brief piece, but it will give parents an idea of the kinds of things that they can do at home. Kids have to put pencil to paper. They have to write."

Mrs. Tom

Mrs. Tom incorporated writing in her reading lessons. Her fifth graders wrote summaries that included who, what, when, where, why and how. They wrote essays from the character's perspective. For example, Mrs. Tom had her students summarize The Cay (Taylor, 1969) using the voice of one of the characters.

Mrs. Tom had written assignments incorporate the use of vocabulary words from the novel. For example, one assignment had the following directions:

Name: _____
From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler Vocabulary Story
Directions:
Write a descriptive story using the following vocabulary words in their correct context. You may make a word plural (example: pedestal can be pedestals) or add a suffix to make it past tense. (example: saunter could be sauntered)
You may write your story about anything except for the actual story in the book. Create your own characters and use correct capitalization and punctuation. Each word must be used in a way that clearly demonstrates that you understand its meaning. Proofread after writing to check your work. Your story must be a minimum of one page long.
Here are the vocabulary words to use in your story:
pedestal dismal solemn mastaba consensus saunter
ascend urn sarcophagus

Figure 5.9 Use of Vocabulary Words in Writing – Mrs. Tom's Fifth Grade

Hunter

My name is Hunter and my sister is Allison. We are both explorers. I wanted to go to Costa Rica but my sister wanted to go to Panama. We finally came to a consensus. We shall go to Egypt.

We got on a plane and went to our destination. When we got there we saw many pyramids. After about 20 min. we found a mastaba. We walked toward it.

The door had to be budged a little. The tomb walls were a dismal color. There were cob webs too. We saw a black, red, orange, and yellow colored bird. It ascended to the top of the tomb on the outside part.

We sauntered on further into the cave.

We were about to turn back when we saw a huge doorway with two whips crossed on the wall and the pharaoh symbol above them. I looked at it. It was a beautiful work of art. We pushed the door it was easy to get in. (nothing like the first one.)

We walked around for about 30 or 35 min. then I saw a pedestal with a plate on it. There were many more of these.

There were also alot of artifacts. There was one more other odd thing I found.

There was a jar with ashes in it. Then

Figure 5.10 Use of Vocabulary Words in Writing – Mrs. Tom's Fifth Grade

I knew what it was. It was an urn.
(Probably ashes of a servant). We had found all
these but not the one thing I wanted.

Then I called Allison to come on but she
said for me to come here and hurry.

When I got there she had a solemn
face on. Then she said "come closer."

I looked. She had found the pharaoh's
sarcophagus. I wanted to take it but
I didn't. We left him there to rest in
peace. (R.I.P.) We left and sealed both
doors tight so that they could not
be opened again. We got home and
planned our next adventure.

Figure 5.10 Use of Vocabulary Words in Writing – Mrs. Tom's Fifth Grade *Continued*

Hi, my name is Phillip and I'm blind.
I was torpedoed on my way back
to America. My mom and I got split
up and now I'm on the Cay Islands
with a big black man, Timothy. I
can't see anything but I can smell, hear,
feel, and taste. I know that I am
on a beach because I feel the
sugar sand, and I hear the ocean waves.
I have not yet tasted anything but
raw fish and biscuits, but I plan
to have coconuts because Timothy said
there were palms.

I wish I were not blind.
I'm always scared that Timothy
is going to leave my side. And I'm
always afraid of a storm or an animal are going
to come along. I feel like I'm useless
and can't do anything. I plan to try to
do things myself and not always try
to depend on Timothy, and to think
of the best things of being blind instead
of the worst. I believe that someone
will come to rescue Timothy and me.

Figure 5.11 Writing from a Character's Perspective – Mrs. Tom's Fifth Grade

Summary

x 2 1/2 (smiley face) (smiley face)

Gulliver's Travels

Author: Jonathan Swift

Gulliver's Travels is a book about a man who lands on a little people island and a big person island. Dr. Lemuel Gulliver loves to sail. He signed up to be a ship's doctor on a ship called the Antelope.

When they were sailing a violent storm hit. It split the ship in half.

Gulliver and some other people on the ship got on a lifeboat. A big wave flipped the little boat and everyone on it flew out in the water.

Gulliver just let the water carry him wherever, and the next thing you know he's on Lilliput, a small people island. The people on Lilliput strapped him down and shot little little arrows in him. When they found out he was good they fed him and gave him shelter.

But he eventually got tired of it and escaped. He was gone nearly 4 years. He came home and stayed on land, but that didn't satisfy him. His next voyage there was a big storm. After the storm they landed wherever it took them. While he was there his crew left him because they saw a huge giant. Gulliver performed tricks to make money for his master. His master sold him to the queen who treated him equally and loved him very much. He was built a house which was taken by a lion and dropped in the ocean. Later he was rescued, and got back home safe & sound.

The End.

Figure 5.12 Summary – Mrs. Tom's Fifth Grade

During one observation the students were grouped by threes and told to write a script for a performance that would involve the use of listed vocabulary words. Students were told that each person was to have a speaking part. As students performed, Mrs. Tom checked off each word that was to be used and discussed those that were not properly used with each group. She offered suggestions for correct usage of the words.

Mrs. Tom used reading as a springboard for writing activities. For example, a writing activity for From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler (Konigsbury, 1967), had students evaluating Da Vinci's inventions. Students then wrote about the invention they felt has impacted modern society most and defended their position. Mrs. Tom also used student writing as a way to gauge their understanding of the text. In discussing their writing, Mrs. Tom said, "It shows me that they have chronological order. It shows me that they understand complex and different parts of the plot. It tells me that they recognize characters and character traits."

Mrs. Tom encouraged creative writing, but stipulated that student writings could not include violence. Content was emphasized as students drafted their work. Mrs. Tom allowed her students to make constant revisions to their rough drafts. Students inserted arrows to indicate where content was added. Mrs. Tom had her students write original stories and plays and create brochures and advertisements.

Assessment

Both teachers employed a wide array of formal and informal assessments. They often provided specific feedback, adjusted their teaching based on monitoring, and gave students strategies for test taking.

Mrs. Harry

Mrs. Harry's students always had a phonics sheet to complete for homework. This was the flip side of the exercise that was worked in class. These sheets were part of the Saxon Phonics (Simmons & Calvert, 1996) curriculum. Additionally, students in Mrs. Harry's room had literacy assignments to complete that were listed on their monthly calendar. Mrs. Harry used both of these activities as an informal assessment to gauge her students' progress. She stated, "The daily homework . . . shows me who understands the concepts." Students wrote daily in their journals. Sometimes the writing was guided and students had to use a prescribed set of vocabulary words in their writing. Other times the writing was student directed. Mrs. Harry stated, "Our writing and reading exercises show me which students have really internalized the concepts and are applying them." She relied on questioning to allow students to tell what they knew. Mrs. Harry did frequent informal assessments for fluency and accuracy when students read orally.

Mrs. Harry had formal assessments in her reading program. Tests were teacher-made and those that accompanied the published materials. Students took a weekly spelling test and phonics assessment. Mrs. Harry assessed oral reading with a running record. She administered the Texas Primary Reading Instrument (Texas Education Agency, 2001) to all students twice during the year to assess letter and sound knowledge and oral reading accuracy. Writing was a major part of assessment. Mrs. Harry stated, "The writings sometimes reveal misconceptions about the story that can be dealt with immediately." Mrs. Harry also used non-traditional assessments. Students created booklets or art projects that demonstrated their grasp of the concept presented. Mrs. Harry stated, "The formal, graded assessments and tests, as well as the children's

writings, provide the parents with an understanding of their child's progress, or lack of it."

Mrs. Tom

Mrs. Tom monitored her students' progress throughout her lessons. Her questioning led her to determine which students were grasping the information and which students needed assistance. Homework also served as a means of monitoring student achievement. Assignments included writing assignments, completion of pages in the vocabulary workbook, studying root words (suffixes and prefixes), or work on an ongoing project. Mrs. Tom also expected the students to read independently each night. Mrs. Tom often determined if her students understood the meaning of newly introduced words by their illustrations or their performances of short skits incorporating these words. Students also read orally and Mrs. Tom did informal assessments for fluency, accuracy, and comprehension.

Mrs. Tom's formal assessments included teacher-made tests and those that accompanied the published materials. Students took units tests from the basal series and from the vocabulary workbook. Frequent tests were given on Greek and Latin root words, suffixes, and prefixes. Mrs. Tom stated, "On each formal assessment, I always try to use a variety of testing questions to assess progress. Some of the types include short answer, fill in the blank or complete the sentence, provide an antonym or synonym to describe a word or action, multiple choice, and illustrations." Writing was a major part of Mrs. Tom's assessment process. She stated, "The very best reading assessment techniques, in my opinion, involve having students write to indicate response to reading. When students

write in response to literature or vocabulary development, I can tell immediately what their understanding and areas of strength/weaknesses are.”

Mrs. Tom also relied on non-traditional assessments. For example, she had her students do paper bag reports instead of a traditional book report. This activity had the student decorate a paper bag with scenes from the book. Inside the bag, the student placed items that were crucial to the plot of the story. As the student showed each item (this could be a drawing), he retold the main events of the story. I found it particularly interesting when two students reported on the same book. Mrs. Tom had them present their report together, though each created his bag separately and was unaware of what was in his peer’s bag. She had one student begin the report. After showing one item Mrs. Tom would say, “And then . . .” At that point, the second student produced an item from his bag and continued with the summary. When commenting on this strategy, Mrs. Tom said, “I do this so that one student will not ‘steal the thunder’ or tell everything that the other had planned to say.”

Another nontraditional assessment used by Mrs. Tom was a plot diagram and a travel brochure. The plot diagram had students list initiating action, rising action, the climax and the resolution. Mrs. Tom stated, “This is where the students will be telling me what they learned from the story. Some of the things . . . about prejudice and realizing that people are all important . . . I saw some heart-felt writing yesterday.” The travel brochure had students design a six panel advertisement for the island featured in The Cay (Taylor, 1969). Each panel was to have text and illustrations. The brochure was to encourage travelers to visit this island and described the food, housing, fishing, and recreational activities available on the island. Of other non-traditional assessments Mrs.

Tom stated, “I often give students the opportunity to draw and sometimes act out their interpretations of vocabulary words or story situations to give another type of assessment.”

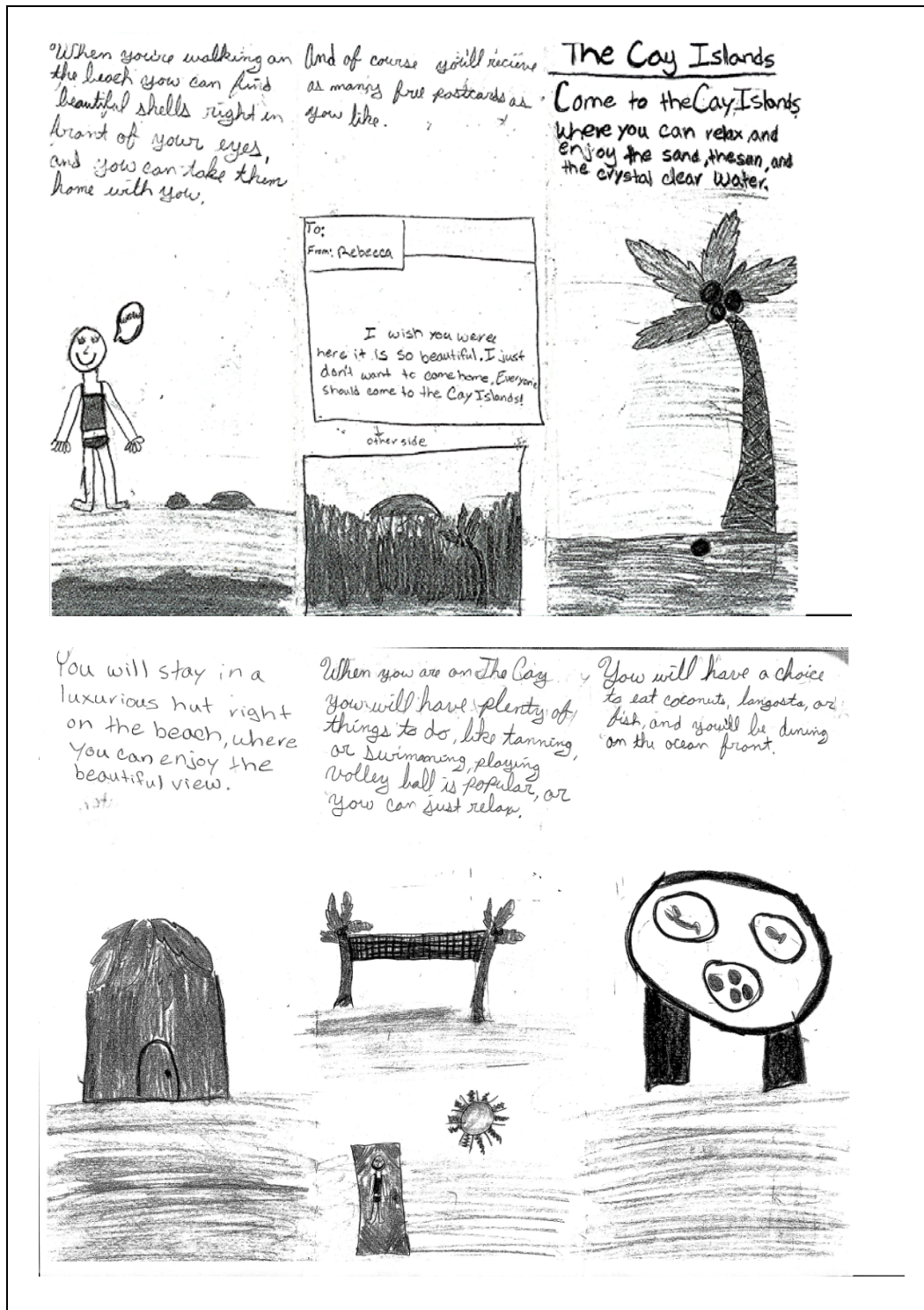


Figure 5.13 Non-traditional Assessment – Trifold Brochure – Mrs. Tom’s Fifth Grade

Teacher Beliefs/Personal Characteristics

Question 2: What are the teachers' beliefs concerning literacy and how do these beliefs shape instruction? What are teacher characteristics/personal qualities that shape instruction?

During scheduled and impromptu interviews with Mrs. Harry and Mrs. Tom, it was obvious that their teaching was shaped by their philosophy and beliefs. This was verified as I observed them at work with their students. I witnessed both teachers employing a variety of techniques that were grounded in their philosophy of how children learn to read.

Mrs. Harry

Mrs. Harry believed that vocabulary development/word recognition, reading fluently, understanding/interacting with text, and meaningful writing were the basic components of literacy. Her conviction that successful acquisition of these behaviors led to the development of lifelong readers guided her instruction. Each lesson that Mrs. Harry planned and developed for her students was with the attainment of these goals in mind.

Mrs. Harry's contention that print must be frustrating to non-readers guided her belief that children needed a way to make sense of the "squiggles" on a page. She aligned beginning reading with learning a foreign language. "It's all about the words...if those are just scribbles on a page to them, it has to be so frustrating and frightening...it has to be scary to be little and that age and see these letters strung together and they don't mean anything...just as I would feel if I were trying to read French." She commented, "I try to think of every way that I can make those words come alive on the page." Students in Mrs. Harry's classroom cut out pictures of the words, drew pictures, and acted out words. They wrote and said words, sentences, and stories. Mrs. Harry's goal was to make the

words memorable for students. She stated, “It’s like a snowball. In the beginning, it seems like they will never learn five words to read in a sentence together that will make sense to them. And the next thing you know, they are writing long sentences.”

Mrs. Harry recognized the fact that students would never be able to memorize each and every word. Therefore, she felt it was her duty to arm students with the tools that they would need to decipher unfamiliar words. Mrs. Harry regarded phonics as the key to decoding. She said, “Phonics can give children a way to think about a possible organization of print and a way to hear the sounds that letters make. Remembering the possible sounds of the letters in an unknown word can give them [students] a place to start to decode it.” She also felt fortunate that all but one student had a strong phonics instruction in kindergarten.

Mrs. Harry searched for new and interesting ways to bring words to life. “Playing games with the word cards . . . seems to increase interest and retention.” Mrs. Harry liked to have students illustrate new words, use those words in oral and written sentences, and spell them with letter cards. She felt that all of these strategies helped her students recognize introduced words when occurring in text. In keeping with her philosophy on the introduction of words to her first graders, Mrs. Harry said, “I want them to understand as quickly as they can what these words are so that they are not strangers. We talk about them [new words] as friends. We talk about our vocabulary words as our new friends and our old friends and putting our friends together.”

Mrs. Harry believed that children needed to have lots of practice reading – silently and orally— at home and at school. This belief was the basis for those strategies that she used to develop fluency in her classroom. If a student misread a word, she allowed for

self-correction, but then had that student re-read the passage correctly. If a student struggled with oral reading, she assisted then said, “Now, try it again.” With each reading of the story, students were able to read with less hesitation and with greater recall. It was important to Mrs. Harry that students heard the text read correctly. Mrs. Harry would model or use a taped recording prior to having students read. Once students had taken turns in reading, she would often have a good reader read the entire story for the rest of the class.

All of Mrs. Harry’s instruction seemed to have the underlying purpose of deriving meaning from print. “We talk a lot about sense. What the story was all about. What it meant. We don’t want to just read the words, word by word. We want to get something from it. So it’s really a kind of experience that we try to have with each story that they read or each book that I read to them.” Her belief that students must understand and interact with text guided the comprehension strategies that she implemented in her instruction. Mrs. Harry wanted her students to “get inside the story.” She planned numerous activities to accomplish this—from reenactments to puppet shows. Mrs. Harry recognized her good fortune in having students who had been provided with many experiences by their families prior to entering first grade. “The children go on trips, have books to read at home, are included in conversations, are involved in sports and hobbies, and have other rich experiences.” Of the knowledge that her students bring with them, Mrs. Harry said, “It makes the difference between a child who understands fully and one who only has a vague idea of what I am talking about.” However, Mrs. Harry extends and enriches students’ experience through her classroom instruction. “I try to provide ongoing

experiences for the children by bringing objects to school. For example, when we had a thimble in our phonics lesson, I brought one.”

The writing component of Mrs. Harry’s program was shaped by her belief that writing was “the flip side of reading.” She used writing to uncover students’ misconceptions and to determine the information that students gleaned from passages read. Students were involved in writing numerous times during the day. Mrs. Harry said, “The better they write, the better they read.” Of her method, Mrs. Harry said, “We talk about words and write words. Then we write sentences and then put sentences together to make stories.”

Mrs. Harry believed that students needed a balance in types of materials to be read (fiction, non-fiction, poetry, joke books, etc.). She also believed that students needed to read published works as well as teacher or student created materials. Mrs. Harry worked with flexible groups throughout the study. Often she worked with the whole class. Yet at times, she would work with smaller groups. Mrs. Harry stated, “The closer in proximity that I can be to each child, the more easily he or she can connect to what I am saying and doing and stay connected throughout the instruction.” When the need arose, Mrs. Harry worked 1:1 with a student. She added, “There are still some children, because of other factors, who will not always attend even in the smallest group. Those children need my attention, one-on-one.”

Of particular interest to me was Mrs. Harry’s use of art in her literacy instruction and her emphasis on illustrations in texts. Mrs. Harry believed that illustrations made stories “come to life” and aided in comprehension. She routinely spent time discussing illustrations with her students. Focused observations led me to note that her students had

become quite astute at observing details in illustrations. For example, one student remarked during a reading of The Biggest, Best Snowman (Cuyler, 1998), “Did you notice that the illustrator put one letter in the snow on each page?” The students enjoyed looking at and discussing varying illustrator techniques. For example, for the story Too Much Talk (Medearis, 2001) that was presented in the basal, students were introduced to the batik method. All tried to emulate this process when illustrating their own stories. One student called her classmates’ attention to the way that the illustrator had drawn an ant inside of a glass in One Hundred Hungry Ants (Pinczes, 1993) and another remarked on the illustrator’s technique of drawing outside of the boundaries.

Usually, Mrs. Harry had students provide an illustration to accompany their writing. She instructed the students, “Do your drawing first, so you can get some good details in your head. It will help you when you write your sentences.” She always made a point of showing each child’s illustrations and discussing it in great detail. She and the student would both comment on the drawing. Students often attempted techniques presented by their peers. In fact, for one lesson, Mrs. Harry had a second grader (one of her students from the previous year) come in to demonstrate a technique. All of her current first graders used this technique that day in their drawing.

Mrs. Harry viewed the parents of her students as partners in the learning process. “They play a crucial role in many ways. They help with homework and other projects, and they encourage their children to perform their best. Parents model what a learner/reader/mathematician/writer is by performing the tasks in their own, everyday lives and in the lives of their children.” She worked closely with the parents in her class, keeping them informed of their children’s abilities and progress.

February 2004

First Grade Fun at Home Skills Calendar

This month is dedicated to writing because it is so important to every child's reading success. Please help your child for a few minutes each night with the topics below, and see that the finished writing is brought to school on Thursday.

The pattern will be the same every week.

- **Monday night** ~ your child lists as many words as possible about the topic.
- **Tuesday night** ~ he/she uses that word list and other words to write at least three sentences.
- **Wednesday night** ~ your child edits and rewrites the sentences to turn them in on Thursday morning.

Please help with spelling, spacing and punctuation.

Thank you for your continued support!

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Telephone Recycling Month	2 How to bake a scrumptious cake!	3	4	5 Bring writing to school! Don't forget!	6	7
8	9 Valentine's Day is . . .	10	11 Donuts with Dad is tomorrow!	12 Bring writing to school! Don't forget!	13	14 Have fun with your family on Valentine's Day!
15	16 Grandparent s are . . .	17	18	19 Bring writing to school! Don't forget!	20 Patriot's Day and Grandparents Art Auction	21
22	23 Winter Break	24 Winter Break	25 Winter Break	26 See you back at school!	27	28
29						

Figure 5.14 Parent Communication – Mrs. Harry's First Grade

Mrs. Harry's demeanor was calm. It is obvious that she respected her students. She commented on implementing a student's idea, which meant a change in plans. She stated, "You have to listen to what they have to say. They have some great ideas. And they have to listen to each other. That goes back to respect." Mrs. Harry stated that she valued kindness and respect in the classroom. She gave thoughtful response to her students' comments and encouraged them to critique each other's work. Mrs. Harry encouraged students to learn from one another.

Mrs. Harry constantly reminded students that it was "okay" to make mistakes. She often exaggerated her mistakes to emphasize this. Mrs. Harry seemed to enjoy interacting with her students and felt that her role in the classroom was one of a coach, though she said that her students probably thought of her as a "grandma." Mrs. Harry had a good sense of humor and she and her students often shared a good laugh. Mrs. Harry was enthusiastic about learning. Many of Mrs. Harry's personal characteristics directly influenced the climate of the room which is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Mrs. Tom

Mrs. Tom believed that knowing letter names and sounds was necessary to becoming a reader and that this foundation should be solidly built in the early years of school. She credited Dodd Elementary for the solid foundation that her students had. Although phonics was not taught as an isolated skill in fifth grade, Mrs. Tom integrated the use of phonics in her vocabulary study. She used a phonetic guide to pronounce new words. She also instructed students individually whenever she noted deficiencies in pronunciation.

Mrs. Tom viewed vocabulary development as crucial to reading achievement and spent a great deal of time in this area. Mrs. Tom stated, “A good vocabulary base including Greek and primarily Latin roots, prefixes, and suffixes, provides background knowledge and aids students in reading comprehension. I think root words, prefixes, and suffixes help them [students] understand when they encounter new words.” She gave as an example, “December used to be the 10th month . . . deci meaning ten . . . but that was in our ancient calendar and now it’s the 12th month.” Mrs. Tom’s passion for root words, prefixes, and suffixes was obvious. Her students became quite astute at decoding by looking within the new word. She added, “The kids may say, ‘that word has this root, so it must mean this.’” Mrs. Tom incorporated new vocabulary words in “natural conversational ways” whenever possible.

Modeling was important to Mrs. Tom and she read orally to her students. When beginning a new novel, she read orally for an extended period in an effort to pique her students’ interest. Mrs. Tom had her students read orally. She allowed students the time for self-correction when an error was made, but did not allow a word to go mispronounced without correction. She stated, “I think that pronunciation is very important. Even kids who are very good readers and who read a lot, often pronounce words incorrectly.” Mrs. Tom stated that she provides correct pronunciation so that students will not be embarrassed later in life by mispronouncing a word.

Having students comprehend what was read in class was Mrs. Tom’s ultimate goal. She gave her students many strategies to interact with the text so that they could derive meaning from the written word. Class discussion was one method that Mrs. Tom implemented to focus on meaning using Bloom’s taxonomy to structure questions and

guide discussions. Mrs. Tom said, “We discuss and model how to identify the main idea of passages, assess which characters are major and minor, look for cause and effect, compare and contrast situations and characters, infer meaning from written passages, and draw literal and logical conclusions.”

Mrs. Tom believed that writing was a fundamental way of having students interact with and respond to text and a method of gauging comprehension. “The very best reading assessment techniques, in my opinion, involve having students write to indicate their response to reading...I can tell immediately what their understanding and areas of strength/weaknesses are.” Students often wrote, as discussed in detail earlier in this chapter.

Mrs. Tom felt that students needed to be introduced to a wide variety of reading material that is interesting to them. Saying that she did not like to read as a child, Mrs. Tom related how reading did not appeal to her until high school when she was able to select her own material. She credits her children’s literature classes in college and reading to her own children with reacquainting her with outstanding children’s literature. She makes a point of “having something for everyone” in her extensive classroom collection. She particularly targets boys, who she feels are “hesitant readers.” Mrs. Tom states, “At this age, I want them to realize that there is adventure and really interesting material that is exciting out there. It doesn’t just have to be boring. So my philosophy is to give them lots and lots of things to read.”

I observed Mrs. Tom to be attuned to students with special needs. She was sensitive to the needs of her students, as evidenced by this remark, “...attention deficit disorder is not a willful act, but a genuine physiological condition that requires unending

patience, redirection, and sometimes outside intervention.” She was careful not to rush a student, giving him time to think. If another student raised his hand to answer while his peer hesitated, she would respond, “Let’s just give him a minute.” Interviews with Mrs. Tom clarified her stance on helping each child reach his full potential. She explained the various ways that she attends to the individual needs of her students. For example, Mrs. Tom stated, “Some students who have processing disorders, such as dysgraphia, often really struggle to get their thoughts down on paper. I do allow my LD [learning disabled] students to do some oral assessment, but also require them to write in response to literature. I encourage those students to type using. . . [a] computer but also do require them to do at least some hand writing because they will be in many situations in life where they will not have access to a computer and will have to produce written answers on the spot.”

Mrs. Tom felt that communication with parents was important. She believed that it was “necessary to communicate expectations to parents ahead of time.” Besides sending home a monthly calendar and quarterly newsletters, Mrs. Tom updated her webpage weekly. Mrs. Tom stated, “Phone calls and parent conferences are always available and parents are encouraged to contact me to set up a conference or discuss their child’s progress on the phone at any time. In addition, it is important for parents to see their child’s work and skill level frequently to determine progress and be aware of any help that is needed at home.”

January 14, 2004

Dear Parents,

I look forward to an exciting third quarter with your children as we continue our adventures in reading! Students are required to read five children's classics this quarter during outside reading time and may choose any classics they have not yet read. Classic reading due dates are listed at the bottom of this letter. In addition, we will read The Cay and selected stories in our reading text. Children may check out classics and The Cay from my classroom library.

We will begin reading The Cay the end of next week. The book tells the story of a young boy, blinded by an injury, who learns to survive on a desert island. It examines issues of survival, prejudice, and difficulties faced by a disabled individual. Students will have some class time to read, but they will need to bring their books home if assigned daily reading is not finished in class. You will receive a reading schedule and list of activities associated with the novel next week.

Thank you for your support!

Sincerely yours,

Third Quarter Outside Reading Requirements: Five Children's Classics worth 30 points each. Students must take A.R. tests for any classics that have them available. Additional activities are listed on the right below: Classics must be completed by the due dates listed below for full credit:

Classic 1 Due Thursday, January 22	Summary of book
Classic 2 Due Thursday, February 5	W,W,W,W,W,& H Writing
<i>Classics 1 and 2 will be included in Progress Report Grade Averages</i>	
Classic 3 Due Thursday, February 19	Plot Diagrams
Classic 4 Due Thursday, March 4	Paper Bag Oral Reports
Classic 5 Due Thursday, March 11	Story Trail

Figure 5.15 Parent Communication – Mrs. Tom's Fifth Grade

Materials

Question 3: What materials in addition to the basal are used by effective teachers in the teaching of reading?

Mrs. Harry

Mrs. Harry used a combination of teacher created materials, student created materials, and purchased materials associated with traditional reading programs. The Saxon Phonics (Simmons & Calvert, 1996) program and the Collections (Farr, Strickland & Beck, 2001) reading series formed the basis for her program. The reading series had

several components that Mrs. Harry used including the basal, basal workbook, language workbook, and individual readers. The series also had supplementary materials for the students. This included vocabulary words (cut into individual cards for/by the students), letter cards for each student (capital on one side, lower case on the other), and a *School – Home Connection* (Farr, Strickland, & Beck, 2001) newsletter that outlined the unit's goals and listed vocabulary words. The phonics program came with two-sided worksheets (one side done in class as part of the lesson, and the other sent home for homework/practice/reinforcement) and a list of phonics rules that Mrs. Harry posted in the room as soon as the rule was introduced. Several times during the observations, Mrs. Harry would refer to a rule posted on the wall.

Mrs. Harry made extensive use of the individual journals, often having students write a story with vocabulary words. Students in Mrs. Harry's room also had two books in their desks that they used, Words I Use When I Write (Trisler & Cardiel, 1989) and Phonics I Irregular Speller (Williams, 2001). Though the Phonics I Irregular Speller (Williams, 2001) was only used on three occasions during my study, I frequently saw students refer to Words I Use When I Write (Trisler & Cardiel, 1989). Mrs. Harry often wrote in words for students that were not listed in this booklet but that students wanted to include in their writings. By the end of my study, several had asked me to write words for them in their book when Mrs. Harry was working with other students. There was writing associated with every lesson. If the students were not writing in their journals, they were using some type of paper supplied by Mrs. Harry—perhaps in the shape of a cat or snowman.

Mrs. Harry heavily relied on trade books. Her classroom library had over 850 books that were part of her personal collection. Additionally, she often brought in library books to complement the daily lesson. I noticed that she purchased books to accompany the themes that she covered during this study—winter, Christmas, etc. Mrs. Harry incorporated at least one trade book, often several, into her reading lesson daily. An informal interview revealed that she read from two to five trade books to her students over the course of the day. She also had an extensive collection of big books that she used with her first grade students.

Students were required to do outside reading. The Accelerated Reader (Renaissance Learning, 2004) program was used to a limited degree early in the year. By the end of February, three students were able to independently take the quizzes and Mrs. Harry would assist the other students. However, Mrs. Harry proudly told me that by mid-April all students independently took at least one Accelerated Reader (Renaissance Learning, 2004) test weekly.

Materials also included items used by Mrs. Harry to keep in close contact with students' parents. In addition to the *School-Home Connection* (Farr, Strickland & Beck, 2001) that was sent home to familiarize parents with the basal reading lesson, Mrs. Harry often sent letters to her parents discussing upcoming topics and activities. A monthly calendar was sent home which suggested literacy activities. Mrs. Harry kept her webpage updated. It included homework assignments, dates for tests, and upcoming events.

Mrs. Harry used materials that she created. While working on comprehension, she brought in two hula hoops and placed them on a large sheet of white paper to form a Venn diagram. Over each hoop she wrote the titles of books that she had just read to

students (one over each hoop). Above the overlap, she wrote “same.” Students then listed ways that the books were similar and different as Mrs. Harry wrote their comments in the appropriate place on the paper. Often she used simple visual aides to emphasize a point. After reading a trade book, Mrs. Harry had sentence strips which recalled the story. Each had a blank that needed to have a vocabulary word to make the sentence complete. Students completed the sentence orally, then wrote in the missing word.

Mrs. Harry had visual aids posted on the walls that served as a form of reference for students. Phonics rules and the alphabet were posted in the classroom as were other items such as contractions that had been introduced and blends, diagraphs, vowels, etc. Mrs. Harry brought visual aids to her classroom to assist in bringing the stories to life. She brought items such as a turnip and vanilla extract (things that were discussed in the stories) that her students may not have experienced. Mrs. Harry brought in novelty items that students seemed to enjoy. For example, she used an oatmeal box for students to reach in and draw out vocabulary words. She used newspaper and magazines for students to make collages or visual aids. Raisins were used to serve as ants in one activity where students listened to a trade book about a picnic.

Students created material that assisted them with comprehension. When working on the chronological order of a story, Mrs. Harry handed students each a sheet a paper and had them follow her directions to fold into thirds, then write *beginning*, *middle*, and *end*. The students drew a picture and wrote a sentence for each section that recalled those parts of the story. They made class booklets that retold the story. Mrs. Harry used items that linked art with reading, often having students illustrate or draw. Her students made puppets out of paper plates to role play the parts in one story.

Mrs. Harry used the overhead and the board in the front of the room. She used a timer to pace students and often used the CD/Tape player. She would put on “thinking music” while students worked independently. She also had the basal story on audio tape and would play it while students followed silently in their basal.

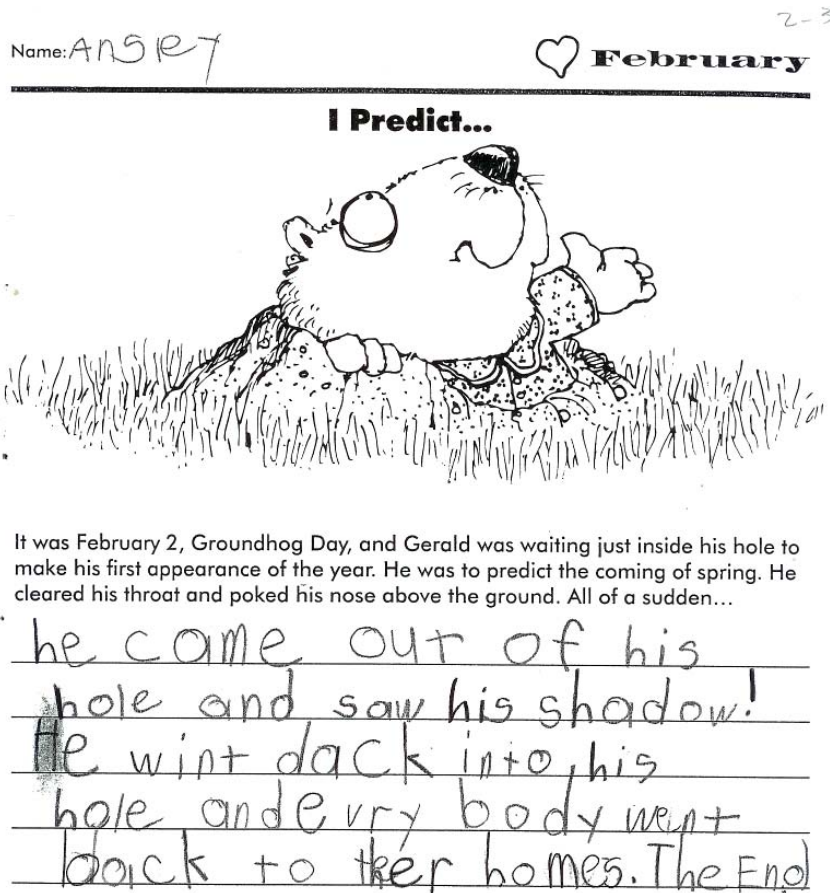


Figure 5.16 Purchased Material – Mrs. Harry’s First Grade
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Mrs. Tom

Mrs. Tom used the fifth grade Collections (Farr, Strickland, Beck, 2001) reading program which included a basal and practice workbook. She also supplemented with a vocabulary workbook, Wordly Wise (Hodkinson & Adams, 1998), which was not a part of the basal series, and additional Latin and Greek root words that she culled from

a Words on the Vine Series (Vurnakes, 1998). During this study, the students in Mrs. Tom's class read the novels From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler (Konigsburg, 1967) and The Cay (Taylor, 1969). The students used store purchased materials that Mrs. Tom had accumulated over the years to accompany these units. She included additional literature as well. Mrs. Tom brought in books on Michelangelo and Leonardo Da Vinci when students were reading From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler (Konigsburg, 1967). Students did research on the internet to learn more about the Renaissance Period. Outside reading required of all students included *Great Illustrated Classics* (Waldman Publishing Corp., 1989). Mrs. Tom required students to take a specified number of Accelerated Reader (Advantage Learning Systems, Inc., 1999) quizzes per nine weeks. Mrs. Tom's classroom library had over 900 books. The class had a scheduled library time each week.

Mrs. Tom created study guides, internet research guides, and packets to help students with comprehension strategies. She often provided word lists and quiz sheets to practice root words. When doing a character description of the two main characters from The Cay (Taylor, 1969), Mrs. Tom had students complete a sheet cut in the shape of the letters M and E (ME) to list individual characteristics of each. When students flipped this over, instead of saying ME, the sheet read WE, and students were to list characteristics of the two when they worked together. Mrs. Tom used materials that the students created daily. When starting a new novel, Mrs. Tom had students make a four column chart with the headings: setting, characters, plot, vocabulary. These were filled in as students progressed in their reading.

Mrs. Tom brought visual aids to pique her students' interest. "When introducing a new book or unit to my students, I strategically place new props or pictures in my room for students to notice before 'exposing' the plan of the day. I usually don't have to mention the 'attention getter' because students are naturally curious and invariably notice anything new in the classroom." While reading The Cay (Taylor, 1969), Mrs. Tom had students sitting on rafts (colored paper on the floor) to read for an extended period of time. They were not to let their extremities hang over because of the danger of sharks. (She actually walked around with paper sharks and dropped them by students who happened to let a foot slip off of the paper.) Her point was for the students to feel confined on the rafts. She also brought blindfolds for the students to simulate how a character felt when he lost his vision. When introducing From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler (Konigsburg, 1967), Mrs. Tom brought an empty violin case and socks for students to estimate how many items Claudia and Jamie could have taken with them on their adventure.

Mrs. Tom used materials to involve multiple senses in the learning process. Often her students illustrated a concept or a vocabulary word. One art activity had the students carving a block of soap and putting their own stonemason's mark, just as Michelangelo would have done on his sculpturing. Mrs. Tom also had visual aids posted on the walls that served as a form of reference for students (Latin and Greek root words, suffixes, and prefixes). Mrs. Tom used newspaper and magazines. She adapted plans from the series to present in a different and more interesting format. For example, Mrs. Tom had students make a card for each reference source that they were studying. Students were to hold up the card with the appropriate source of information to answer the question she posed.

When Mrs. Tom asked, “Where would I look for a synonym?” Students held up a card that read *thesaurus*.

The materials used by Mrs. Tom for assessment were both traditional and non-traditional. She used tests from the publisher, created her own traditional tests, had students write summaries, and had them illustrate vocabulary. Three unique projects completed by her students were paper bag reports (a decorated bag holding items that related to the plot), travel brochures advertising a visit to a land similar to what students read about in The Cay (Taylor, 1969), and a plot diagram of a novel indicating initiating action, rising action, climax, and resolution.

Mrs. Tom issued a calendar to parents monthly that was done in conjunction with the other fifth grade teachers. It listed testing dates and project deadlines. She also sent home a detailed letter with requirements for each quarter that parents were to sign and return to indicate their awareness of assignments.

Equipment used included the overhead and the board in the front of the room. Mrs. Tom often used a timer to pace students. Mrs. Tom had several management aids that she used. Students always used a *privacy fence* when testing. These were manila folders stapled together to be stood upright around a test. Another item, Mrs. Tom’s pointer, seemed to amuse the students. This was a stuffed glove, index finger extended, on the end of a dowel. She used this to review root words, suffixes, and prefixes.

Classroom Climate/Teachers’ Role/Management

Question 4: What is the climate of classrooms with effective reading programs? What type of classroom management does the teacher employ? What is the teacher’s role in the classroom? What is the relationship between teacher and students and between students?

Mrs. Harry

The climate in Mrs. Harry's room was one of positive relationships between students and teacher and between students. The students were respectful and attentive to Mrs. Harry. During formal and informal interviews, Mrs. Harry labeled her students as "sweet," "wonderful," and "absolutely the best." She felt as if the students were kind to one another and this was evidenced by their actions. On one occasion when students were to make a paper plate mask to perform a story, one girl made the wrong mask. A classmate said, "She can use mine since I already had a turn." Students often complimented each other. For example, after a reading one child said, "I like the way she had her voice." When the assignment was to include a drawing of a snowman with a story, three of the students named their snowman Matthew because it was his birthday that day.

Mrs. Harry valued her students and their work. She often told them so. Comments such as, "You have ideas just as exciting as the author's!" or "I couldn't have said it better myself!" were the typical words that she said to praise her students' efforts. In discussing her students' unique ideas and creative work, Mrs. Harry commented, "They think of things that I wouldn't think of. They're coming from a different perspective than I am." Mrs. Harry often implemented the student's suggestions. After explaining one activity to the class—students were to write a "pretend" letter to the character in the story—one student said, "Why don't we write to the author instead?" Mrs. Harry replied, "That's a wonderful idea! I wish I had thought of that!" Students then wrote to the author.

Reading and writing were not the only subjects taught during these observations. Mrs. Harry made a point of having her students view situations from different

perspectives. For example, she said, “How do you think you would feel if you didn’t get a Valentine, like the little boy in the story?” Or when students tasted seaweed to accompany a lesson and remarked that it was “nasty,” she replied, “Well, maybe to us, but a lot of people think that it tastes great.”

Lessons were personalized by using the students’ names in sentences that she wrote for the class. Mrs. Harry also personalized lessons by linking stories to events in their lives. During a story about a sister, she managed to mention each student’s sister(s) by name in her discussion. Often the students would sound like Mrs. Harry in their comments. One student called the author’s use of illustrations “clever,” a term that Mrs. Harry used frequently.

Mrs. Harry’s management style was businesslike, yet fun. She remarked, “I run a pretty tight ship.” I witnessed Mrs. Harry setting timelines and enforcing them. She often set the timer for the task at hand and gave explicit instructions. Of her management style, Mrs. Harry stated, “We play on the playground. We play at home. In here, we are all about learning. . . We have fun with the activities that we do . . . But in here, it’s always business.”

Classroom routines were well established and students were aware of procedures to follow. Both behavior and academic work were monitored by Mrs. Harry. She felt that students needed logical consequences and was consistent in how she reacted to situations in the classroom. She verbally corrected students if there was a need or made adjustments to lessons if student response indicated that this should occur. Mrs. Harry expected students to regulate their own behavior. Discipline was not a problem in her classroom.

Perhaps one of the key points of Mrs. Harry's management system was the preventive steps that she took to meet her student's needs. She was aware of the physical needs of her students and allowed her first graders to have a water bottle on their desk and to use the restroom whenever needed. Through monitoring she was able to detect when students needed a break and often had them up and moving before continuing with a task. She was able to anticipate what would happen and manipulate the situation so that transitions went smoothly. For example, as students moved from a whole group activity to smaller groups (one group to work with her and another to remain at their desks), she stated, "Use your crayons and not your pencil colors for this. We don't have time to sharpen them." When a student returned from the office after a playground accident, she stopped the lesson and let him tell the class about his injury and bandage before moving on with the lesson.

Mrs. Harry saw her role in the classroom as that of a coach. She modeled what she wanted students to do. Mrs. Harry gave explicit instructions and provided specific verbal praise. Often the praise was a detailed review of the assignment's requirements. For example, "Look at this! She has a space between words. Each sentence begins with a capital letter. She has a period, question mark, or exclamation mark at the end of each sentence. She has quotation marks around what her character is saying." Mrs. Harry built on students' experiences. She often showed her students how much she loved to read.

Mrs. Tom

The tone of Mrs. Tom's classroom was also positive. She created an environment where all students felt free to take risks. Mrs. Tom stated, "Kids need to be comfortable and they need to feel that they are valued . . . they need to feel safe. Safe to read out loud

and to talk and safe that their teacher is not going to criticize them and that other kids will listen.” Mrs. Tom felt that her students were accepting of each other and displayed kindness to one another. Mrs. Tom modeled this kindness by thanking her students after each response or after reading orally. Students were not allowed to write about violence. The “S word” (stupid) was not allowed in the classroom.

Mrs. Tom corrected students when needed, both for behavior or as instructional feedback. However, she always did so in a polite and positive way that allowed students to maintain their dignity. When a student was unable to supply the correct answer, she offered examples. She even allowed students to use a *lifeline* (modeled after a current television show where one asks a friend for help). Though it was rarely needed, Mrs. Tom made corrections about behavior in a matter-of-fact manner. On one occasion she said, “It bothers me that you are speaking while I am speaking.” However, I noticed that only moments after this verbal correction, she selected this same student to head up a group discussion. Mrs. Tom may have not been pleased with a particular student’s action, but she was always pleased with the student. The students in Mrs. Tom’s class were expected to self-regulate their behavior. They needed little assistance from Mrs. Tom.

The needs of the students were important to Mrs. Tom. On several occasions she adjusted the time allotted because the bulk of the students were not able to complete the task by the deadline. She adjusted assignments when she felt that students were overloaded or that the assignment created a conflict with other classes. Mrs. Tom was especially cognizant of the student who needed more time to respond. “Let’s give him a little more time to think,” was a typical response when a student hesitated and another child wanted to provide the answer. Because Mrs. Tom’s class was comprised of students

with special needs (dyslexia, dysgraphia, attention deficit, and articulation difficulties), she made accommodations for individual differences. For example, she allowed the students who had difficulty in transferring answers to an answer sheet to mark directly on the test. Students who needed to view the questions and the text at the same time were allowed to take apart the test and place these items side by side. Students who needed to subvocalize when reading a test were allowed to go into an empty room across the hall so that this would not disturb the other students. “I really try to keep the room quiet when people are reading and working in the room . . . Some kids, especially your kids with attention problems, are very easily distracted.”

The manner in which Mrs. Tom distributed papers to her students intrigued me. For a teacher who was such an efficient manager of time, I was surprised to see her distribute papers to each of the twelve students in her classroom individually. An informal interview with Mrs. Tom revealed that this was done so that she could make personal contact with each student. “I do like to talk to them, but it does take a little more time.” She added that she often used this method as an opportunity to inform students of accommodations for that particular exercise. Mrs. Tom said, “I might say to a student, ‘It’s okay to write on this sheet instead of the answer page’ and not call a whole lot of attention to him.”

She viewed her students as sources of information and constantly marveled at how they learned from each other. Students remarked that they learned from their classmates as well. For example, when one student used the word *foe* in writing, he found himself defining it for several other students. The following week, one student said, “I

heard Denny's word *foe* in the movies this weekend. It was neat that I knew what he [the character] meant."

Mrs. Tom felt that her role in the classroom was that of a motivator—"a provider of opportunities and encouragement." She said, "I want to get them interested and motivated because they will push themselves . . . I want them to become lifelong readers." Mrs. Tom felt that it was her responsibility to be excited and prepared. Of her relationship with her students, Mrs. Tom said, "I love them very much. I think that they know that I am a teacher and not a peer. . . But they also know that I will do anything for them, to help in any way."

Mrs. Tom felt that students need to be held accountable and this was evident in her classroom management system. Students were well aware of expectations and consequences. There was a ticket system in place used mainly for classroom management. Students were given a set number of tickets that they kept with them in a zip lock bag. Students were either awarded tickets as positive reinforcement or had to forfeit tickets when an action did not meet classroom expectations. For example, students forfeited tickets if they had to leave the classroom to retrieve an item or if the teacher had to supply a new one (a study guide, etc.). Periodically, Mrs. Tom "opened her store" where students could cash in their tickets.

There were usually multiple activities going on at the same time in this classroom. However, Mrs. Tom seemed to always be aware that the noise level needed to be such that it was not distracting for those that needed more quiet. I found myself learning about procedural directions that were already in place. For example, when Mrs. Tom said, "Use three inch voices," she meant that someone more than three inches away should not be

able to hear what was said. Mrs. Tom used a word that sounded like *den-two-ee* when reminding students how they were to look at their classmate's projects. She later explained that DNTUI meant *Do Not Touch Unless Invited*.

Routines in Mrs. Tom's classroom were well-established. Students knew to copy homework when first entering the room. They also knew where supplies were and how Mrs. Tom expected them to get the materials that they needed. There was a checkout system for students to borrow one of Mrs. Tom's books. Students knew to sign up to take an Accelerated Reader (Renaissance Learning, 2004) test on the computer and they knew when it was the appropriate time to take this test. Mrs. Tom often employed a procedure that she called "popcorn reading" This procedure involved Mrs. Tom asking a student to read orally. After that student read for a while, Mrs. Tom would say "popcorn" and the student was to call on a classmate to continue from that point. Students followed along silently. They were never aware of when they would be asked to read orally.

The use of humor was evident in Mrs. Tom's classroom. She made jokes routinely and seemed to enjoy the sense of humor displayed by her students. Once when expecting a grammatically correct response, she repeated the question several times wanting a response each time. (To the question, "Who agrees?" Mrs. Tom wanted the response "I do" instead of "me.") She laughed after a third time and said, "Oh, it sounds like I want a robot, doesn't it?" A student replied using a mechanical voice, and all laughed.

Life lessons were taught in Mrs. Tom's classroom. She used literature to open classroom discussions on prejudice, empathy, and tolerance. She expected students to evaluate character's motives and perspectives. The students determined lessons that could

be gleaned from the stories. On the culminating activity on The Cay (Taylor, 1969), one student said, “He learned to not judge people by their skin color and that you can find a best friend in the most different people.”

Mrs. Tom was aware of her students’ physical and emotional needs. Assigned seating changed often during this study. Mrs. Toms used flexible grouping for activities. Often she stopped an activity to have students march around the room. “You can see them zoning out, but I do the same thing. . . I’ve got a need to move . . . I was obviously a wiggler in 5th grade.”

Parent communication was vital to Mrs. Tom. In addition to a monthly calendar and a webpage that was updated weekly, Mrs. Tom sent home a detailed letter at the start of each quarter outlining upcoming assignments, outside reading, and in class activities. She was also available for telephone conferences or parent conferences as needed. Mrs. Tom did depend on parental support and sent home papers weekly so that they were aware of their child’s progress and skill level.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Findings – Cultural Themes

This ethnographic case study examined four facets of effective literacy instruction: instructional strategies, teacher beliefs/characteristics, materials used, and classroom climate. Thick, rich descriptions have given detailed accounts of what actually occurs in effective classrooms. By analyzing data collected from prolonged observations and in-depth interviews, categories were developed and elaborated and an understanding evolved of how each related to the other. Cultural themes were identified based on the categories that emerged from these domain, taxonomic, and componential analyses. These themes centered on the questions which shaped the research. Information gleaned from this study extends the existing literature on effective literacy instruction and identifies the elements that are present in successful literacy programs. This study provides insight into the practice of effective literacy teachers.

This study answered these questions concerning effective literacy instruction:

1. What are the strategies used by effective teachers in helping their students to read? Why are these particular strategies used?
2. What are the teachers' beliefs concerning literacy and how do these beliefs shape instruction? What are teacher characteristics/personal qualities that shape instruction?
3. What materials in addition to the basal are used most often by effective teachers in the teaching of reading?

4. What is the climate of classrooms with effective reading programs? What type of classroom management does the teacher employ? What is the teacher's role in the classroom? What is the relationship between teacher and students and between students?

Question 1: What are the strategies used by effective teachers in helping their students to read? Why are these particular strategies used?

A cross case analysis determined that there were many strategies shared by these two teachers. Explicit skill instruction for decoding and word recognition occurred in both classes, with heavy emphasis on synthetic phonics in the first grade. The phonics instruction observed during the reading lessons was not isolated, but related to the connected text. Explicit instruction was also provided for vocabulary development. Fifth grade instruction focused heavily on root words, prefixes, and suffixes. Multiple strategies were given to students for word identification. Strategies to assist students in making these words their own included many writing opportunities and the use of multiple senses such as illustrating new words or performing skits that incorporate newly introduced words. Use of newly introduced words in natural conversation was a tactic employed in both classrooms. These teachers verified student understanding of new words by having students use these words in oral and written sentences.

Obtaining meaning from the text was the overriding goal of both teachers. Simply recalling text was not sufficient. Students were expected to synthesize, analyze, evaluate and interact with text. Metacognitive skills were emphasized as teachers modeled their own thought processes. Both teachers implemented strategies to assist students with breaking down the text. These teachers also connected reading to other areas in the

curriculum. The teachers used scaffolding, thereby basing instruction on students' prior knowledge and assisting students as needed to acquire new and challenging skills.

Students were provided many opportunities for authentic reading. Guided oral reading and independent silent reading were major components of daily instruction. The teachers provided models for proficient reading and had students re-read inaccurately read passages. Mrs. Harry and Mrs. Tom knew that students needed to have time to read. Both provided class time for extended reading and required outside reading.

Writing was an important strategy in literacy acquisition in both classrooms. Mrs. Harry used writing as a way to reinforce the conventions of print and to check understanding of individual words and text with her first graders. Mrs. Tom also had students write in response to their reading as an assessment technique. Writing instruction was highly individualized as both teachers taught the strategies required by their curriculum addressing structure and content. Different genres of writing were completed by students individually or as part of a group in both classrooms.

Student progress was carefully monitored. Assessment in both classrooms was ongoing and involved formal and informal methods. Questioning throughout the lessons involved the use of higher level thinking skills. Formal assessments included non-traditional forms of assessments such as role playing and completion of projects.

The cultural theme that emerged from research focusing on classroom strategies was that reading instruction was guided by a holistic approach—one that mixed explicit instruction of skills with authentic reading for meaning. Instructional practices were complex providing students with many opportunities to read and write. Both highly skilled teachers modeled extensively and took advantage of teachable moments.

Question 2: What are the teachers' beliefs concerning literacy and how do these beliefs shape instruction? What are teacher characteristics/personal qualities that shape instruction?

Instruction in both classes was guided by the teachers' beliefs about literacy. Both teachers believed that knowing letter names and sounds was necessary to becoming a reader and that this foundation should be solidly built in the early years of school. Vocabulary development was crucial to both teachers and both felt that students needed to be introduced to a wide variety of reading material that was interesting to them. Modeling was important to both teachers; therefore, they read orally to their students. Mrs. Tom and Mrs. Harry allowed students the time for self-correction, but neither allowed a word to go mispronounced without correction. Both teachers were careful not to rush a student, giving him/her time to think. Mrs. Harry thought of beginning reading as similar to a person learning a foreign language. Her goal was to make the words memorable for students so that they could get meaning from the text. Mrs. Tom also saw reading as a meaning-making experience. Both teachers felt that writing was a crucial part of literacy instruction and saw the need to have a balance in the materials used for instruction.

Mrs. Harry and Mrs. Tom believed that parents were important in developing literacy. These teachers kept parents informed. They relied on parental assistance for tasks outside of school, even if that assistance involved only monitoring the completion of tasks. Both teachers were especially sensitive to the needs of their students. They made special accommodations for students with learning differences and attended to the physical, social, and emotional needs of all. The teachers were calm and soft-spoken in

the classroom, yet their excitement and passion for literacy and learning was obvious. There was open communication between students and teachers.

Instruction in these classrooms was shaped by the teachers' beliefs of how students learn. Both teachers were lifelong learners and their dedication to developing the love of reading, writing, and learning in their students was another cultural theme that emerged.

Question 3: What materials in addition to the basal are used by effective teachers in the teaching of reading?

Both classes used a combination of teacher created materials, student created materials, and purchased materials associated with traditional reading programs. The traditional basal program was the foundation of both classrooms. In the first grade, there were many items in this purchased program that accompanied the basal—individual phonics readers, flash cards, workbooks, and taped stories. In the fifth grade, the basal was used in conjunction with vocabulary books and novels. The Accelerated Reader (Renaissance Learning, 2004) program was used, to a degree, by both teachers. Visual aids were an integral part of instruction. Items were used to stimulate interest, help with understanding text, or to serve as a point of reference for students. Traditional equipment, including the board in the front of the classroom and the overhead, was used quite often. Both teachers issued a letter and calendar to parents monthly.

Both teachers brought into the program a great variety of literature. The classroom library in both rooms was extensive with fiction, nonfiction, poetry, magazines, comic books, and series books available to the students on varying levels of difficulty. Both teachers utilized the school library on a weekly basis. The study showed that both of these teachers were using those materials that Allington (2001) tells

educators are needed for effective literacy instruction: “Perhaps workbooks and all skill-and-drill reproducibles should be required to carry a warning: Caution. Sustained use of this product may cause reading/learning difficulties. Conversely books might carry a label that said: Research has demonstrated that regular reading of this product can reduce the risks of acquiring a reading/learning disability” (p. 29). Both teachers used literature extensively. Therefore, the cultural theme that emerged from research in this category demonstrated that a literacy rich environment is a vital part of a successful reading program.

Question 4: What is the climate of classrooms with effective reading programs? What type of classroom management does the teacher employ? What is the teacher’s role in the classroom? What is the relationship between teacher and students and between students?

Both classrooms were positive and nurturing settings where the teachers set high expectations for their students. These classrooms were safe places where student input was valued and students felt free to take risks. In both classrooms, much more was taught than literacy skills. This was evidenced in one of the culminating activities in the fifth grade where students summarized what was learned from a novel read. One student wrote, “He learned to respect people for who they are.”

There was a high rate of student engagement and students were encouraged to self-regulate their behavior as it related to discipline and learning. Both teachers had superb classroom management skills. Routines were well-established and transitions were smooth. There were logical consequences for behavior, but behavior was not a problem. Grouping was flexible and changed often throughout the study.

These teachers saw themselves as coaches and motivators, or, as Mrs. Tom said, “a provider of opportunities.” The teachers had a definite awareness of purpose, but both

were masters at opportunistic teaching. They supported students by building on prior knowledge to scaffold instruction. There was a spirit of cooperation in these classrooms. The students and teachers had a mutual respect for each other, yet it was obvious that the teacher was the authority figure. Students were valued and student ideas were frequently implemented in classroom instruction.

The cultural theme that emerged from studying the classroom environment was the importance of a safe and warm environment with established expectations. Other themes include the teachers' excellent classroom management skills which led to high student engagement and the importance of involving parents in the educational process.

Summary

Perhaps this study should be called *The Business of Teaching Reading*. Though both classrooms had a warm and friendly feel to them, it was obvious that the teaching of reading was serious business. Both teachers knew exactly what skills were to be covered with each lesson; however, teachable moments were not ignored and detours were taken when the need arose. Reading for meaning was of utmost importance. There was no wasted time in either room, yet both teachers set enjoyment of reading as a priority. The teachers allotted time for uninterrupted reading in the classroom and expected students to read at home. During scheduled and impromptu interviews with Mrs. Toms and Mrs. Harry, it was obvious that their teaching was shaped by their philosophy and beliefs.

This study has taken a detailed look into two classrooms where effective literacy instruction occurs on a daily basis. Through focused observations and follow-up interviews, I have been able to discern elements that are in place that enhance student achievement. By recounting dialogue, giving examples of activities, and providing

samples of documents, a thick, rich description has evolved which could benefit others who would choose to emulate these practices.

Limitations

Both classrooms in the study had a low student-teacher ratio. Students in the school took an entrance exam before being admitted into the school. It was noted that, although the school's admission policy stated that it accepted "average to above average students," there were students in both classes with learning differences. However, all of the students had average to above average aptitudes. The fact that the researcher is also the principal of the school may be considered a limitation by some.

One component of instruction that was virtually absent from both classrooms was the integration of technology in the reading curriculum. With the exception of the Accelerated Reader (Renaissance Learning, 2004) program, there was no other use of the computer by students in the first grade classroom during this study. I observed the fifth graders using the computer on two other occasions, and that was when the class moved to the computer lab to conduct a guided internet research project. Both teachers cite the lack of time as the major factor contributing to this phenomenon. Mrs. Tom's reading class meets for a total of five hours per week. Students receive language arts instruction, including writing, from another teacher. Mrs. Harry uses computers as part of her center rotations that occurred later in the school day. Students completed drill practice and activities that reinforced basic skills in math and language arts. The students in both classes received computer instruction once a week from the school's technology coordinator. At this time, students were given skill training on topics specified by the teacher or used this computer class time to expand on a classroom project by integrating

technology. The classroom teacher accompanied the students to computer class and the two teachers worked together to incorporate the technology activities into ‘real’ learning in the classroom.

Implications for Future Research

Continued research on the practice of successful teachers could offer additional examples of exemplary instruction. Teachers can benefit from these examples of success by implementing the same strategies and techniques in their own classrooms, tailoring these strategies to meet the particular circumstances of their students. Each of the four questions answered could be expanded to discover new ways that instructional strategies, teacher beliefs/characteristics, materials used, and classroom climate could be structured to maximize reading achievement.

An in-depth study of any domain uncovered in this project is also implicated. For example, research on metacognition could offer practitioners valuable insight into the cognitive processes involved in literacy activities. This research could help students recognize their own thought processes and instruct them in methods to regulate these processes. Research could also assist teachers in developing effective strategies for teaching metacognitive skills.

Another focus of research implicated by this study is the use of technology in the teaching of reading. The possibilities provided by technology are endless, especially as it relates to students with special needs. The opportunities technology could offer for student collaboration are also great. Research of instructional practices utilizing technology and its integration into the curriculum could provide teachers with information needed to make technology a vital component of literacy instruction.

Epilogue

This study has helped me to see that many factors come together to make a successful literacy program. The relationship that exists between the student and teacher, the classroom climate, the effect that the teacher's personality and characteristics have on students, the teacher's use of instructional techniques based on her beliefs, and the materials used are all components that are intertwined. The successful mix of the right variables leads to effective literacy instruction.

I am grateful to Mrs. Harry and Mrs. Tom for allowing me to conduct my study in their classrooms. I have learned a great deal from these master teachers and their students.

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APPENDIX A – TEACHER RATING SCALE

5 *Always exhibits*

2 *Seldom exhibits*

4 *Exhibits most of the time*

1 *Does not exhibit this behavior at all*

RATE 1 – 5

3 *Exhibits occasionally*

- 1. Teaches reading for authentic meaning-making literacy experiences: for pleasure, to be informed, and to perform a task.**

5 4 3 2 1

- 2. Uses high quality literature.**

5 4 3 2 1

- 3. Integrates a comprehensive word study/phonics program into reading/writing instruction.**

5 4 3 2 1

- 4. Uses multiple texts that link and expand concepts.**

5 4 3 2 1

- 5. Balances teacher- and student-led discussions.**

5 4 3 2 1

- 6. Builds a whole class community that emphasizes important concepts and builds background knowledge.**

5 4 3 2 1

- 7. Works with students in small groups while other students read and write about what they have read.**

5 4 3 2 1

- 8. Gives students plenty of time to read in class.**

5 4 3 2 1

- 9. Gives students direct instruction in decoding and comprehension strategies that promote independent reading. Balances direct instruction, guided instruction, and independent learning.**

5 4 3 2 1

- 10. Uses a variety of assessment techniques to inform instruction.**

5 4 3 2 1



APPENDIX B
LETTER FROM BOARD OF TRUSTEES GRANTING
PERMISSION FOR STUDY

November 28, 2003

Julie Bergeron
404 Pollard Place
Shreveport, LA 71106

Dear Julie,

I received your letter requesting permission to conduct your doctoral study at
School. In your letter you indicated that you had permission from the
students, parents and teachers. Based on that information, permission is granted for you
to conduct your study.

Sincerely,

Board of Trustees Chair

APPENDIX C

PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

PROJECT TITLE: Elements of Effective Literacy Instruction in the Elementary Grades

PERFORMANCE SITE:

INVESTIGATOR: Julie L. Bergeron
Available for questions: M – F
8:00 a.m. – 3:30 p. m.
318.869.2361

PURPOSE OF STUDY: The purpose of this research project is to determine elements of effective literacy instruction by examining teacher beliefs about the teaching of reading, teaching strategies and materials used, and the classroom climate.

INCLUSION CRITERIA: Students enrolled in the selected first grade and fifth grade reading class.

EXCLUSION CRITERIA: Children not in the two classes selected.

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY: During a nine week period, a total of 70 observations or interviews (of 45 minutes to one hour) will be made - 35 in each classroom. The study will include a review of the literature as it pertains to literacy instruction, data collection using both interviews and observations concerning literacy instruction (with field notes, audio/video taping), and collection of artifacts such as student and teacher work. Data will be analyzed so that meanings can be generated and conclusions drawn as to what elements comprise effective literacy instruction.

BENEFITS: Students will participate in classroom literacy activities as usual. The benefit to other students is the identification of elements the comprise effective literacy instruction.

RISKS: There are no known risks.

RIGHT TO REFUSE: Participation is voluntary. A student will become part of the study if both student and parent agree to the student's participation. At any time, the student or the student's parent may withdraw the student from the study without penalty or loss of any benefit to which he might otherwise be entitled.

PRIVACY:

The school records of participants in this study may be reviewed by the investigator. Results of this study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included for publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

FINANCIAL
INFORMATION:

There is no cost for participation in the study, nor is there any compensation to the subjects for participation.

SIGNATURES:

The study has been discussed with me and all of my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Chairman, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692. I will allow my child to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Parent's signature

Date

APPENDIX D

CHILD ASSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to be in a study to find the elements of effective literacy instruction. I will be required to do the normal things that I do during reading/writing class. I know that I will be observed during reading/writing class. I may also be audio/video taped and/or interviewed. Samples of my work may be used in the study. I can decide to quit the study at any time.

_____ Child's Signature	_____ Age	_____ Date
_____ Witness	_____ Date	

APPENDIX E

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Principal Investigator: Julie L. Bergeron
318.869.2361
Available: Monday – Friday
8:00 am – 3:30 pm

I understand that the title of the project in which I am participating is *Elements of Effective Literacy Instruction in the Elementary Grades*. It will be conducted in my elementary school setting. The purpose of the study is to determine teacher beliefs about the teaching of reading, teaching strategies and materials used, and the classroom climate. I was selected for this study based on successful teacher evaluations and my reputation as a reading teacher.

I understand that a total of 35 visits will be made to my classroom during a nine week period. These visits will last forty-five minutes to an hour and may include interviews with me when I am unencumbered. Field notes and audio/video taping will be conducted where the conversation will be recorded to be transcribed later. I will submit my professional growth plan, lesson plans, and other documents that I feel may be pertinent to understanding my role as a leader in the field of reading. The documents will be those that are required by my school system and are publicly available.

I understand that the benefit of this study is to help provide a more in-depth understanding in the scholarly area of literacy instruction. My participation in the study is voluntary. I may change my mind and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which I may otherwise be entitled. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed in this study.

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Chairman, LSU Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the researcher's obligation to provide me with a copy of this consent form if signed by me.

Subject Signature

Date

VITA

Marie Julie Laurent Bergeron received her Doctor of Philosophy from Louisiana State University in August, 2004, in Curriculum and Instruction. She has received three other degrees from Louisiana State University: a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education in December, 1975; a Master of Education in Reading with a minor in Psychology in August, 1978; and an Education Specialist in Curriculum and Instruction in December, 1996. The author retired from the Louisiana public school system after twenty successful years as an elementary classroom teacher. She holds state certification in the elementary grades, kindergarten, and is certified to teach academically gifted students. She is also certified as a Reading Specialist, a Supervisor of Student Teachers, a Parish or City School Supervisor of Instruction, and as an Elementary School Principal. She is currently the Head of School at a private school in Shreveport, Louisiana.

Bergeron was the Christa McAuliffe Fellowship Winner for the state of Louisiana in 1996 and received a Fulbright Memorial Fund Fellowship to study in Japan in November, 2001. She was selected Teacher of the Year in Caddo Parish in 1996-97 and was the regional winner and a state finalist. She has served as a master teacher and as an evaluator of teachers for the Louisiana State Department of Education in the LTIP/LaTEP program. She served as the chairperson and assisted her elementary school in receiving the U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon status. She has served as a member of the Louisiana Education Assessment Program Writing Team and as a member of the State Accountability Task Force with the Teacher of the Year Roundtable Forum. The author is a member of Phi Kappa Phi, Delta Kappa Gamma, Phi Delta Phi, International Reading

Association, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and serves as a teacher/consultant for the Louisiana Writing Project.